SPAIN GOURMET TOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

D.O. Priorato
Shades of Burgundy

Sea Urchins
An Unusual Winter Pleasure

Sobrassada
Saving the Sobrassada de Mallorca

Festivals
Celebration of Food

55

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Haute Cuisine in Miniature

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EDIT

Editor
Cathy Boirac

Publication Coordinators
Sonia Ortega and Bettina Krücken

Editorial Secretary
Angela Castilla

Design Coordinator
Lynda Bozarth

Design and Art Direction
Manuel Estrada, Diseño Gráfico

Layout
Francisco Sánchez, Manuel García, Txomin Arrieta, Nieves Barco, Marta Barrón, Nuria Francino

Maps
Javier Belloso

Color Separations
Proyectos Gráficos Digitales

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Advertising
CEDISA
Tel.: (34) 913 080 644
Fax: (34) 913 105 141
pcyc@retemail.es

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Dear readers,

Will the 21st century see the triumph of fast food? Despite all odds, many of us still celebrate the annual arrival of natural produce. This year, we bring you a three part series that takes a closer look at some of Spain's approximately 400 gastronomic festivals. In January, the pig is the focus of celebrations in Granada, while in Catalonia, some people can put away 4 kilos of very special little onions at a sitting. And if you feel like indulging yourself – rather more moderately – with new minimalist *pinchos* from the Basque Country, you may well be able to find some of the ingredients in the delicatessens of Sydney, Tokyo, Milan, New York, and elsewhere, whose key figures give us their comments in this and subsequent issues.

Of course some ingredients don't travel well – indeed, some not at all - but are worth seeking out. In Majorca, for example, sobrassada is being rediscovered. Try it as a spread on toast or with a little honey. And to accompany this surprising combination, we recommend a Priorato wine.

Have you ever heard of "Aristotle's lantern"? Asturians and Catalans are mad about it.

And speaking of Aristotle, whose philosophy was disseminated throughout Europe by the translation schools of Moorish Spain, he would certainly have enjoyed peripatetic discussions with our 21st century Quixote, a physicist in search of intellectual beauty.

Now read on!

Cathy Boirac
Editor–in–chief

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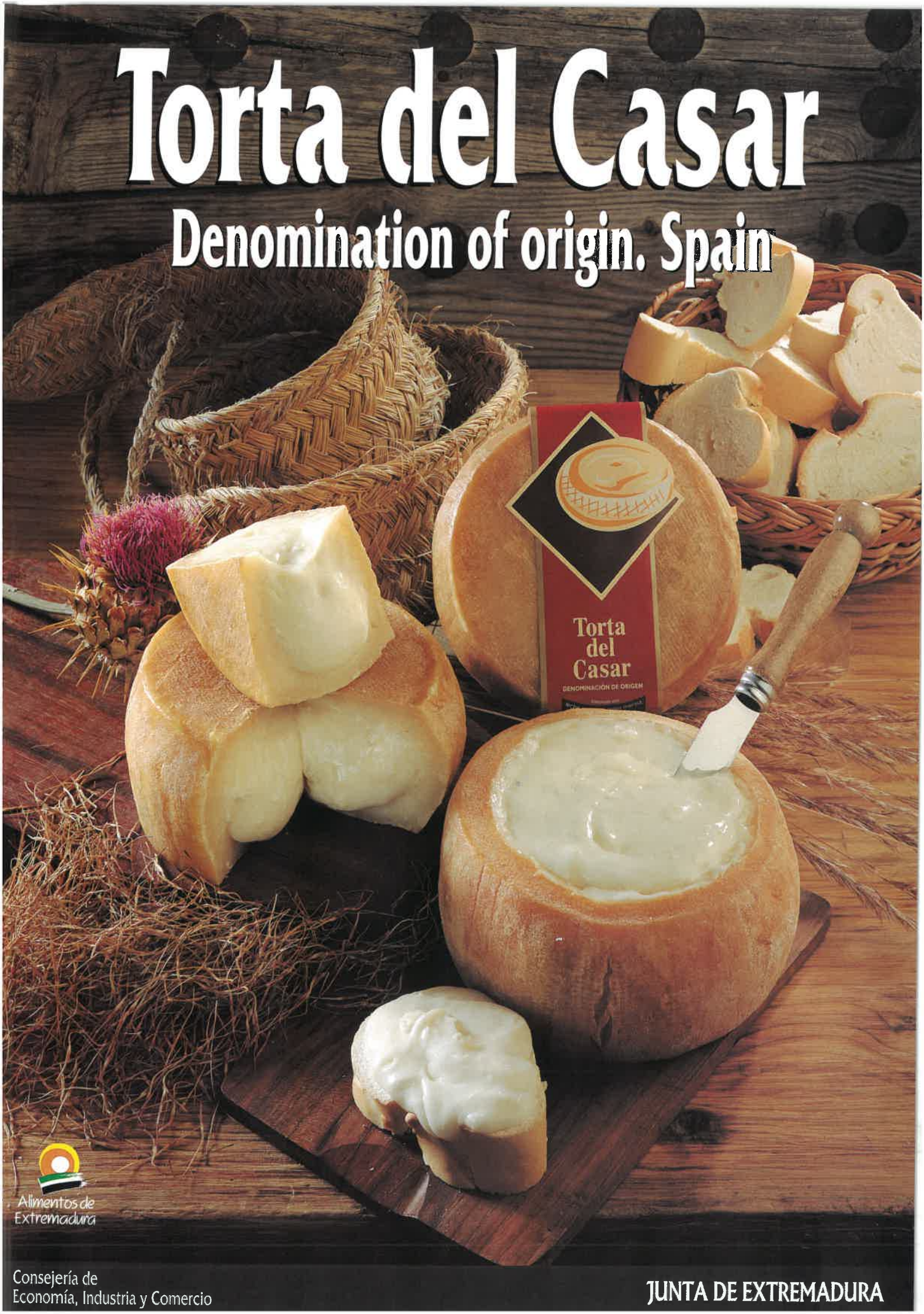

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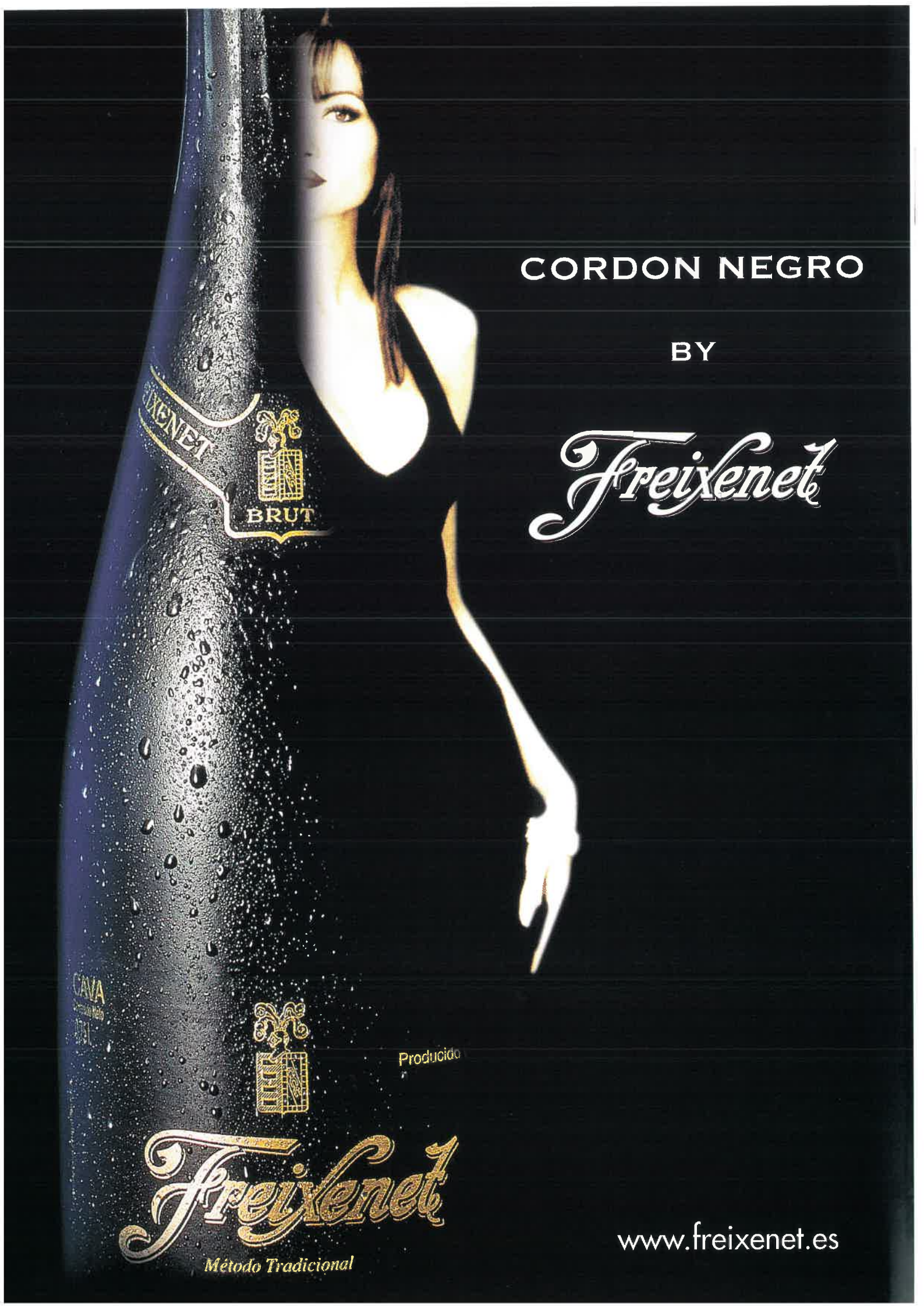
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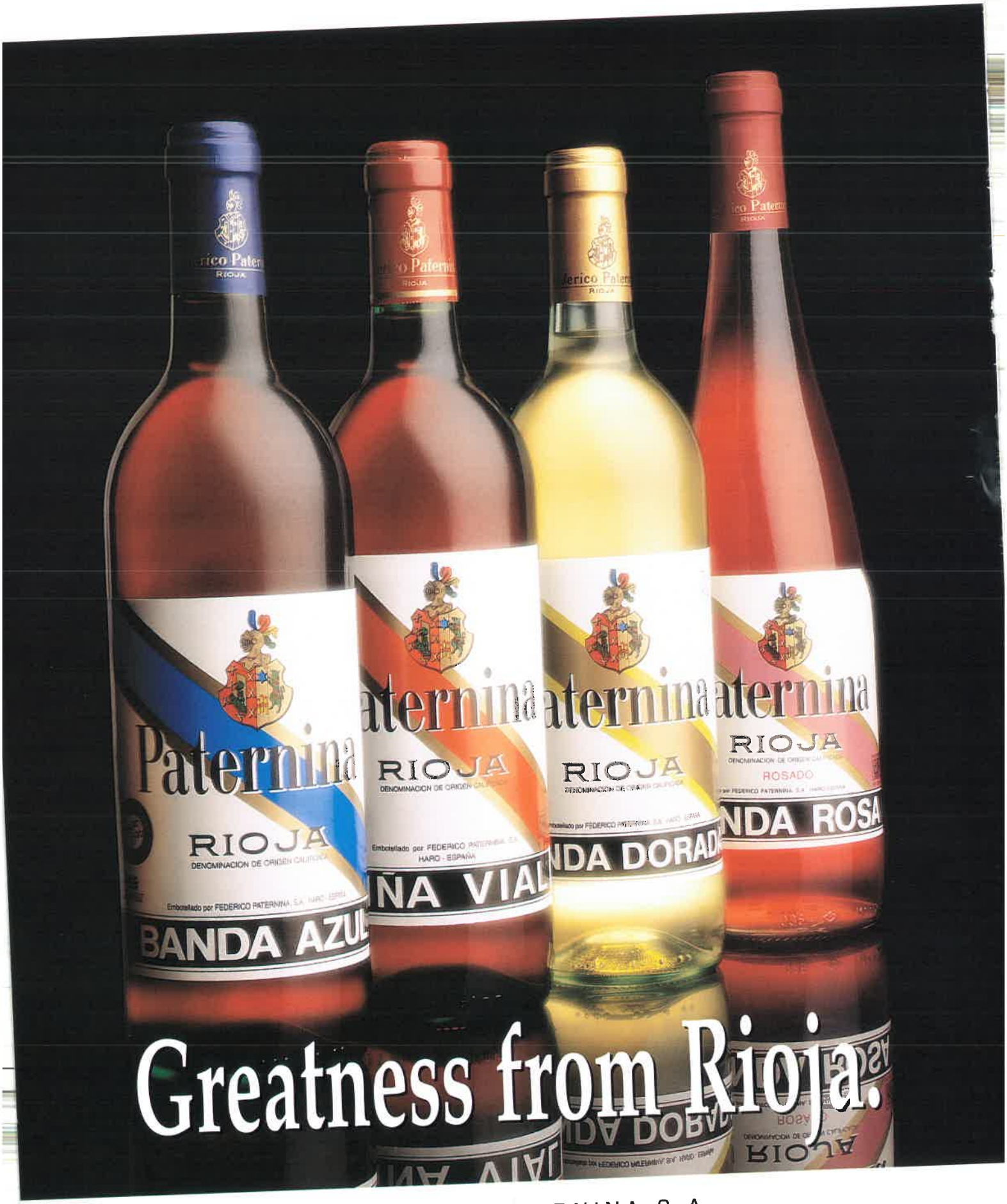

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Part 1

DELICATESSEN SUITE

The select range of Spanish specialties available at leading delicatessens is a showcase presenting gourmets worldwide with a taste of the country's cuisine. In the first article of our new series, we shall be visiting two purveyors of fine foods in Toronto, Canada's most diverse city, whose streets are a veritable kaleidoscope of cultural influences. Tokyo's oldest delicatessen provides local food lovers with ingredients that at times even manage to upstage traditional Japanese food. Meanwhile, two very different delicatessens in Italophile Munich and open-minded Berlin supply German gourmands with the best of Spanish produce.

TEXT
JULIA AITKEN

PHOTOS
DESIGN ARCHIVE/ICEX

ILLUSTRATION
JAVIER ZABALA

Canada
Northern Exposure

Sprawling along Lake Ontario's northern shoreline, Toronto is Canada's biggest city and the country's financial center. Like all large North American cities, its glass and steel towers define Toronto's skyline, but behind this modern, homogeneous façade is one of the most vibrant and culturally diverse communities on the continent. The city's many ethnic neighborhoods keep an enthusiastic hold on their traditions, providing Torontonians with an astonishing choice of foods in both restaurants and grocery stores. A large southern European community has ensured products such as olive oil are already well entrenched in the city's culture, and now Toronto stores are successfully introducing other foods from Spain. A smart move in a city which loves the new and innovative.

Sen5es

Blond wood, chrome and glass dominate the decor in this shrine to fine food on Toronto's prestigious Bloor Street. With neighbors such as Cartier and Emporio Armani, Sen5es is not a store Torontonians run into to pick up milk and bread. In fact, the 600-square-meter store sells no basic groceries, and specializes instead in gourmet products from around the world. Sen5es' product development manager Anastasia Galadza refers to the company's flagship store–there are two others in Canada and one in Washington D.C.–as a "food utopia," adding, "Sen5es is the kind of place where our customers can discover foods that aren't trendy–yet."

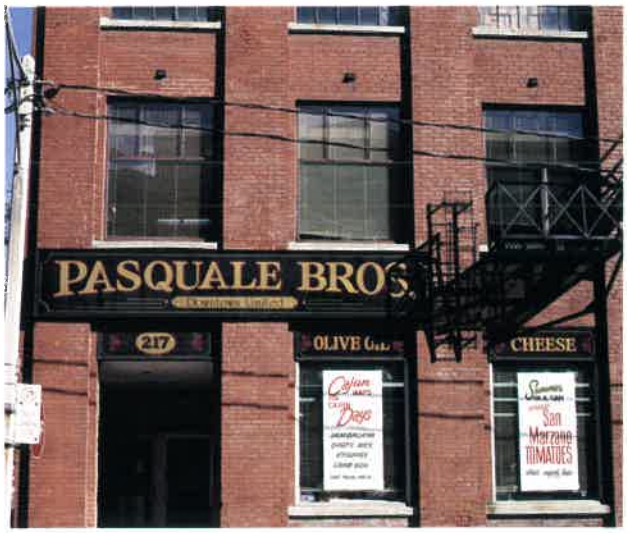
The store's mission, according to Galadza, is "to import the coolest and most desirable products from around the world. I don't buy a product just because it comes from a particular country," she continues. "The items we stock are very, very special so those I choose have to be so amazing that I can't possibly ignore them. My buying is very focused."

On recent purchasing trips to Spain, Galadza has trained that focus on four lines that fit her criteria perfectly. Barcelona-based Enric Rovira's range of chocolate products, for example, are, says Galadza, "so innovative, they're still cutting-edge in Spain."

Rovira's chocolate creations range from solid blocks of chocolate modeled on traditional Spanish tiles, to a complex collection of candy-covered chocolates, depicting the sun and its planets.

Other products featured at Sen5es include Rihuelo cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil from Rioja. Sen5es carries two varieties: an unfiltered blend called Puesolé, and the single-varietal Empeltre. As with Rovira's chocolates, Sen5es

is the sole North American retailer of this oil, which is bottled for the store only when ordered.
From Jerez comes Bota Vieja *gran reserva* sherry vinegar. Both sweet and hot *pimentón de la Vera* are supplied by Santo Domingo Paprika, of Extremadura. Other products from Spain that Galadza is planning to introduce to the store include jars of single-varietal olives–Arbequina, Manzanilla and Empeltre–and Miguel & Valentino *piquillo* peppers from Navarre.
Spanish products fit well with Sen5es' aim to provide its customers with unique foodstuffs. "One of the appealing things about Spanish products," says Galadza, "is that there are so many more to discover. Spain has a food culture that's unique but not very well known." Galadza's enthusiasm for Spanish cuisine is something she's obviously keen to pass on to her customers and, to that end, a future project involves the creation of a "tasting box" containing four Spanish cheeses, along with traditional accompaniments, such as quince paste, and wine pairing suggestions.
Asked what makes Spanish products so good, Galadza laughs. "Lots of love," she replies. "Our suppliers are totally committed to their products." And it sounds as if Sen5es' Galadza is just as dedicated to them too.



Pasquale Bros.

Just east of Toronto's financial district, in an imposing red brick heritage building is a grocery store that's become an institution among the city's leading chefs. Family-run Pasquale Brothers was founded in 1917 and today more than three-quarters of the company's business is with the Toronto area foodservice industry.

Since Toronto is one of the best places to eat on the North American continent, the city's chefs are busy people. "When I make sales calls on our chefs," explains president John Kalcevich, "I have to show them something new, something they haven't heard of before, then they're happy to see me." About ten years ago, he discovered that innovative "something" in products from Spain. Kalcevich claims Pasquale's was one of the first stores in the city

to import Manchego and Cabrales cheeses, the first to introduce piquillo peppers, and the first to bring in sherry vinegars from Jerez.

"Back then," Kalcevich explains, "people in the foodservice industry were becoming blasé about Italian food–balsamic vinegar and Parmesan didn't excite them any more. We had always imported tomatoes and artichokes from Murcia, and I felt that Spain was an opportunity for growth and a resource for new ideas for Toronto's chefs."

The majority of Pasquale's products are imported and of them a staggering 75 percent are Spanish. From olive oil to artichokes, almost every product packaged under the company's Julius house brand originates in Spain. The reason, says Kalcevich candidly, is because "Spain has the finest ingredients in the world."

In the initial stages, Kalcevich admits, Spanish products were a hard sell because, he explains, "our customers hadn't been exposed to true Spanish cuisine. But that's changed now and potentially my best customer is the Torontonian who has traveled to Spain and wants to try the food back here in Canada. Now, we're constantly looking for new products from Spain."

Among Pasquale's encyclopedic Spanish inventory are extra virgin olive oils, sherry vinegars, capers, peppercorns and peppers by Columela; piquillo peppers from Dantza; bomba rice; Barruz olives and *banderillas*. And, that's just the start. In addition, Pasquale's sells one of the largest selections of Spanish cheeses in Toronto. Kalcevich explains how his customers love the history behind some Spanish cheeses, especially Manchego. "I tell them about Don Quixote," he says, "and the fact that Cervantes mentions Manchego throughout his novel, then I tell them to buy a loaf of bread, a bottle of Rioja, a wedge of Manchego and some Spanish olives, sit down and enjoy them." Wise words indeed.

Julia Aitken is a freelance food writer and cookbook author living in Toronto. She is food editor of Elm Street magazine.

Sen5es
15 Bloor Street
Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A3
Tel: 416 961 0055

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TEXT
MARI WATANABE

TRANSLATION
JENNY MACDONALD

PHOTOS
MATAO OGATA/ICEX

Japan
The Search for Quality

Japanese cuisine and the diet of the Japanese are today two different things. A relatively low percentage of people in Japan still base their diet on traditional Japanese food, increasingly preferring foreign dishes. While Japanese food, with its sushi and sashimi, is gaining in popularity all over the world, at home these are giving way to Western food. Italian cuisine, especially, has caught on in recent years, creating a demand for Mediterranean products such as olive oil, table olives and wine. Olive oil was practically never used in traditional Japanese cuisine as frying was all but non-existent, with all foods being stewed or roasted.

Kinokuniya International

Spanish cuisine comes second in popularity after Italy, but is something of a mystery in Japan. Mr. Mihara, head of Kinokuniya's purchasing department states, "We have been working with Spanish products for some time but sales have not increased much, probably because people here only know of Mediterranean products through Italian cuisine. So they buy olive oil to prepare a pasta dish, or anchovies to decorate a pizza."

Kinokuniya is a large chain of supermarkets in the Tokyo area with five shops in the capital and two in Kanagawa. It became renowned as the place to buy top-quality, imported goods at a time when it was difficult to get them in Japan.

A point very much in favor of Spanish products is that Spanish olive oil has recently earned a name for its quality, and the most innovative and popular product sold by Kinokuniya via the Internet is now the Núñez de Prado organic olive oil from Baena.

The Kinokuniya stores offer extra virgin olive oil from several Denominations of Origin such as Baena, Jaén and Siurana. Mr. Mihara would like to import oils from all the D.O.s because of the interest they create amongst his customers. "Once they've tasted the oil, they come back for more, even though it's more expensive than others. This is a clear sign that they appreciate its quality."

Other popular Spanish products are anchovies, stuffed olives and canned shellfish. The latter, including squid in its own ink, sardines in oil and mussels in a spicy sauce, are gaining more and more addicts since they are easy to use as *tapas*. Japanese consumers are only too pleased to try out new Spanish flavors.

"When we organized our Spanish Food Week last year," states Mr. Mihara, "sales of *piquillo* peppers and Navarran asparagus in cans went down very well. Until then, these products were completely unknown here."

This company's experience has shown that Spanish food products are becoming increasingly popular amongst Japanese consumers and that, with good promotion and advertising to pave the way, there is a potential new market in Japan for quality foods from Spain.

***Mari Watanabe** specializes in Spanish gastronomy. She has published several books on the subject and writes for a number of magazines in Japan and Spain.*

Kinokuniya International
11-7 Kita Aoyama 3-chome
Minato-ku, Tokyo 107
Tel: 3 3409 1231
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This company has several stores in Tokyo and one in Yokohama

TEXT
MARION TRUTTER

TRANSLATION
SYNONYME

PHOTOS
ANDREAS RILZ (BERLIN)/ICEX
GREGOR M. SCHMID (MUNICH)/ICEX

Spanish Flavors in Germany

Sun-ripened fruit and vegetables from Spain have long been popular in Germany. Ever more tourists are now exploring the lesser-known corners of the Peninsula, discovering Spanish regional cuisine along the way, and this has helped specialties such as Spanish hams and cheeses, as well as high quality preserves, not to mention Spanish wines, to conquer the German market. Whether in the food hall of Berlin's KaDeWe department store or at Feinkost Käfer in Munich, food lovers will find an enormous array of ingredients to conjure up the aromas of Spain in their own kitchens.

KaDeWe Berlin

On the sixth floor of Berlin's Kaufhaus des Westens (KaDeWe) is the 7,000 sq. meter food hall, making it the largest delicatessen department anywhere in Europe. "Our policy is to offer the customer practically anything," explains Marcus Porzucek, the department manager, "so we carry specialties that most delicatessens wouldn't touch." This claim also holds for Spanish produce, which ranges from simple salad leaves to the rarest of delicacies. "Spanish producers offer both quality and competitive prices," says Porzucek, and these are the key criteria for daily decisions in this enormous market. Spanish varieties dominate citrus fruits, and peppers, salad vegetables, strawberries, raspberries, cherimoyas (breadfruit), persimmons and grapes are all strong lines. Canary Islands tomatoes, though, have a lower profile in this foodies' heaven in the heart of Berlin. Vegetables buyer Klaus Bernhardt explains that this is because customers "mostly go for tomatoes on the vine, which give a more natural impression. If the Canaries' producers would only leave a bit of stalk, we would sell a lot more." KaDeWe's fresh fish department also nets the best catch of the day. The origin of the produce plays a less important role in this department, but Spanish fish–hake, tuna, whiting and even treats like spider crabs and sea urchins–always find their way onto the counter. The choice of Spanish fish and seafood preserves spans everything from anchovy fillets pickled in vinegar, different mussel and tuna preparations to a bonito terrine. Enticing meat preserves from Spain include Iberian pig and partridge pâtés. Prepared dishes such as tuna-filled piquillo peppers, squid in its own ink, *fabada*–the famous bean stew from Asturias–and a hearty tripe dish (*callos a la madrileña)* provide a cross-section of Spanish cuisine. KaDeWe's biggest seller, however, is the one-liter bottle of *gazpacho,* which positively flies off the shelves in summertime.

The star of Spain's specialty hams, the Iberian (also known as *pata negra)*, is now a firmly-established feature in an extensive range. Serrano ham, cured to various grades of maturity, is also popular, as are air-cured *chorizo, lomo,* poached hams and all kinds of Spanish sausages. Of the 1,300 different cheeses available in KaDeWe, around 25 are from Spain, led by Manchego matured for three, six or twelve months. A particular specialty is the Manchego *al romero,* a cheese matured in a jacket of rosemary. The cheese department also finds room for Tetilla and Mahón, Valdeón, Zamorano and Idiazábal, as well as rare delicacies like Montenebro del Tié-

tar, a soft cheese made from goats' milk, and Majorero cheese from the island of Fuerteventura. Spanish olive oils with their strong, fruity notes have swiftly closed the gap with Italian and Greek competitors in the preferences of the Berlin public. This was especially clear during the "Spanish weeks" organized last year. Rising demand has been met by approaching an increasing number of suppliers. KaDeWe stocks a small but extravagant selection of loose and canned Spanish olives, some of them stuffed with such tidbits as salmon or lemon. Spain also shines with tarragon vinegar and various kinds of sherry vinegar. On request, KaDeWe will even order a 1923 Gran Reserva vinegar for the discerning customer.

Mr. Porzucek has also noted a tremendous growth in demand for Spanish wines. "Customers have understood that the price quality relationship is still very good for these wines. Spain produces many wines to vie with good French bottles but at a much lower price," explains the department manager. The leaders among the 200-odd offerings from all of the Spanish regions are Rioja, Ribera del Duero and Priorato. Wine lovers will also find excellent quality from Galicia, the Penedés, Jumilla or the Balearic Islands, however. In addition, there are some 70 to 80 sherries in complete product lines from dry *finos* to creams and around ten Spanish brandies.

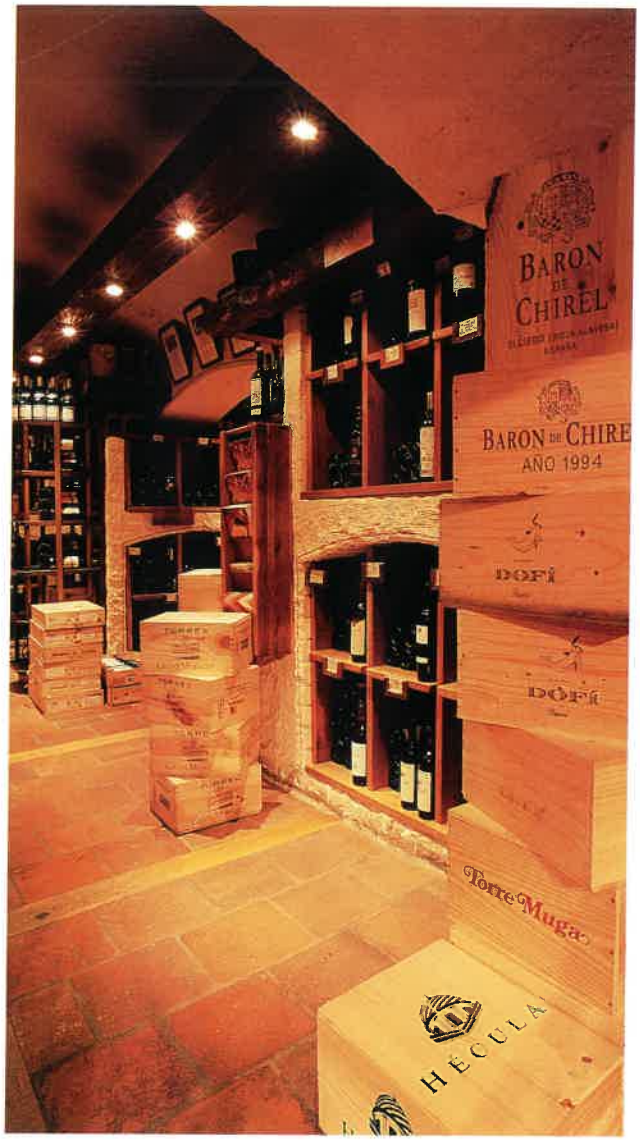
For those still floating in holiday reminiscences, KaDeWe also stocks Spanish beer (Cruzcampo and San Miguel), mineral water (Fuensanta), tiger nut milk (*horchata*) and coffee, *tortas de aceite*, five different kinds of honey, all from the same company that produces Vega Sicilia wine. And for a Spanish dessert, there is powdered flan and *crema catalana*.

Feinkost Käfer/Munich

Spanish foodstuffs have not had an easy ride in "Italy's northernmost city" until now. The Munich customer is decidedly pro-Italian, and this is a challenge for those like Feinkost Käfer who offer Spanish specialties. "We are extremely interested in Spanish products," says Christian Zandonella, the firm's import buyer, "although the Munich area lacks importers specializing in Spain who could provide a wide range backed by suitable logistics for small retailers like ourselves."

Because of this it is hard to find really rare Spanish products in Käfer. On the other hand, the country dominates in fruit and vegetables, especially during the winter months. "The quality and look of Spanish produce is right," a point on which the vegetables buyer, Siegfried Goller, is at one with his colleagues in Berlin. Canary Islands tomatoes, citrus fruit from Valencia and strawberries from Andalusia all have a strong following in Munich, as well as the numerous varieties of peppers, broccoli and courgettes, artichoke and a wide range of salad vegetables. According to Goller, white asparagus has also been well-received for its quality in the German market. Andalusian raspberries, cherimoyas and persimmons are also popular.

Spain also leads by a short head with its specialty olives, because the country offers such variety and excellent quality. At the counter the olives are presented loose, including large, fruity *sevillanas* and a wide choice of stuffed varieties, such as almond or red pepper. Spanish olive



oils, on the other hand, have hardly dented the hold of Italian competitors in Munich, despite their excellent price-quality relationship. Käfer in fact stocks only a single olive oil from Andalusia (the renowned Núñez de Prado *flor de aceite)*, which sells no more than a dozen or so bottles each year.
Classic hams and sausage varieties are the high flyers of the Spanish assortment, especially Iberian ham, serrano ham, chorizo and a number of different kinds of *salchichón*. Spanish cheese is also growing strongly and Käfer presents its Manchego and Tetilla, Tronchón and Mahón, Idiazábal and Ibérico at a small, specialist counter. Zandonella sees a lot of room for progress in this area. "There are small- and medium-sized cheese makers all over Spain who offer wonderful specialties, but there is a lack of importers capable of handling small orders.
The delicatessen shelves, too, hold only the classics like capers, saffron and the aromatic pimientos del piquillo. Among the fish preserves, one finds *ventresca de bonito del norte* and baby eels in olive oil next to anchovy fillets and tuna. Fresh Spanish fish, such as hake, turbot and sometimes even whiting, are regularly available at Käfer. For special customers ordering in advance, the department manager, Hans-Georg Staib, can also lay hands on goose barnacles *(percebes)* and baby eels *(angulas)*–delicacies that are rarely to be had in the German market.
Spanish wines also have a, rather small, corner in Käfer's wine cellar. Pride of place is given to the Priorato region, the high flyer of recent years, even before Rioja and Ribera del Duero. The choice of Spanish sparkling wines, with only three *cavas*, is hardly worth mentioning. Käfer buyer Zandonella would gladly give Spanish specialties more of a chance, however. "Once we are convinced by a product and the importer offers the right blend of professionalism and logistics, we are happy to buy. We are always delighted to receive specific suggestions and good information, because we are keen to push new products."
The Spanish Weeks that Käfer holds from time to time are a step in this direction, and it is planned to concentrate on particular regions in future.

***Marion Trutter** is a travel and food writer specializing in Spain and has published the standard work* Culinaria Spain. *She lives in Starnberg near Munich.*

Kaufhaus des Westens
Tauentzienstraße 21-24
10789 Berlin
Tel. 030 21210
www.kadewe.de

Feinkost Käfer
Prinzregentenstraße 73
81675 München
Tel. 089 41680
www.feinkost-kaefer.de

MINIATURE

Haute Cuisine in

TEXT
GONZALO NUIN
JUAN JOSÉ LAPITZ

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
TOYA LEGIDO/ICEX

–Good morning. What can I get you?

–Two *zuritos* (small glass of beer), two *crianzas,* one special white and a *chacolí,* please.

–Anything to eat with that? What about a hot *pincho?*

–What do you recommend?

–Well, there's everything you see on the bar, plus...

That's the way it works, more or less. You help yourself to the ready-made pinchos on the bar or counter, or order what is on offer from the kitchen. You do have to pay for them, though. It isn't like many other parts of Spain where you are given a complimentary *tapa* or snack without asking for it. Here, when you have eaten and drunk what you want, you ask for the bill, tell the waiter how many pinchos you have eaten, and of what kind, then pay up and move on to the next bar.

The pincho pilgrimage route provides many taste experiences in just a couple of hours.

What Is a Pincho?

In the Basque Country (northwest Spain), the term pincho nowadays refers to a little (or not so little) serving of a dish prepared in the kitchen of a bar, restaurant, or cafeteria, usually (but not always) eaten accompanied by a drink, and nearly always standing up.

In principle, then, it could be described as a sample, a mouthful, of something larger, of sit-down-knife-and-fork food. It's a snack that lines an otherwise empty stomach against the effects of wine.

This sort of snack has been, and still is, known by various names in Spain–*banderilla,* pincho, tapa–this last being the best-known abroad. We are going to call it a pincho, as is the general custom in the Basque Country. A purist would claim that, strictly speaking, a pincho should consist of foodstuffs speared on a pincho, which means "stick." The term banderilla (banderillas are the beribboned darts used in bullfighting) clearly suggests the same concept, but the way that pinchos have evolved in quality and quantity has by now turned the term into a more generic one which embraces stickless recipes, too (though we do know one letter-of-the-law pincho maker who presents a self-supporting little piece of bread topped with Russian salad with a cocktail stick stuck into it). Size-wise, pinchos should always be small–two mouthfuls on average. The custom of going from bar to bar, sampling pinchos as you go, is known hereabouts as *ir de pinchos;* in the course of such a bar-crawl you would probably take in a few small servings, or *raciones,* of knife and fork food, too, though again standing at the bar. New behavior patterns are emerging–some people load a plate with food at the bar, then sit down at a table with a glass of beer or wine and tackle it as if it were a restaurant meal–but that's not the traditional Basque way of doing things.

Recipes:

For a comprehensive range of current pincho recipes, we refer you to the suggested reading list on page 46. Meanwhile, here is our selection of recipes for some of the best, described by their creators, just to give you some idea of the state of the art. The following description by one pincho bar chef of how he sets about inventing a new pincho speaks for itself: "First I think about how to make it, what ingredients, in what proportions, and so on. Then I find out what other bars are offering along the same lines, and I sample and analyze them. Then I do trials with each of the prime ingredients, testing different cheeses, sauces and so on. Then I bring (the prototype) out and ask customers whose opinion I respect what they think of it. Only if the result is completely satisfactory do I then put it into circulation."

Aloña Berri

Veal Sweetbread and Wild Mushroom Tartlet

Serves 10:

- 550 g (1.2 lb) veal sweetbreads
- 200 g (7 oz) wild mushrooms
- 1 large potato
- 2 shallots
- 0.5 dl (3 tbsp) dry sherry
- 0.5 dl (3 tbsp) rich meat stock or gravy
- 25 g (1 oz) pasta cooked *al dente*

Poach the sweetbreads in water for three minutes, refresh in cold water, drain, then place a weight on top to break down the fibers. Meanwhile, finely chop the potato and shallots and cook gently in a little oil until soft. Add the sliced mushrooms, then the sliced sweetbreads, and heat them through thoroughly. Add the sherry and meat stock, cook until everything is tender, then whizz in the blender. Serve in an oval tartlet, topped with a little piece of pasta.

Modern pinchos incorporate innovations in tune with the gastronomic transformation that has affected Spain.

The traditional way is to eat pinchos in the course of a *chiquiteo*. This is the custom, very traditional in the Basque Country, of a gang of friends going round various bars or *tabernas* for a few *chiquitos* (little glasses) of wine. Or, indeed, little glasses of beer, known as zuritos (see above), an increasingly popular variant which makes the whole thing more manageable. And it is essential to take your time about it, tasting and enjoying each pincho and giving it the attention it deserves.

These days, you are guaranteed to find top quality pinchos, for a very simple reason: cooks of one persuasion have made huge efforts to create a new, refined, sophisticated cuisine, while those of another have made equivalent efforts to retain the values of traditional Basque cuisine, which is robust and flavorful. These parallel processes of innovation/conservation have produced constant improvements both in ingredients and approach, so that food lovers can find at pincho level a variety and standard that it would be difficult to rival at a restaurant table. Furthermore, apart from its inherent pleasures, the ritual chiquiteo is a social event par excellence: no *donostiarra* (inhabitant of San Sebastián, capital of Guipúzcoa province) being visited by a friend, relation or business client from elsewhere would dream of not taking them around the Old Quarter or other *barrio* to sample the local pinchos.

In their current form, the pinchos served in many of San Sebastián's bars are far removed from a simple juxtaposition of different ingredients and flavors on a stick; the preparation that goes into some of them requires a degree of knowledge, experience and technique that a top

restaurant might demand. This means that many pincho bars have to employ highly qualified and specialized staff in their kitchens to create what they want to serve.
As a result of the pincho having been turned into a skill-based art form, the sybaritic ritual of devoting a day to traveling the pincho route, a sort of pincho pilgrimage, has become one of the city's main attractions for tourists and locals alike. San Sebastián is set in marvelous countryside, which sells itself; it also offers convenient, attractive services and crowd-pulling music and visual arts festivals. But only when you have done your pincho fieldwork can you claim to have "done" this city: you will then have sampled the keystone of its splendid gastronomy. Its famous "starred" restaurants provide one classic experience, its superb pincho or banderilla bars another. The pincho pilgrimage route provides so many taste experiences in one day that however demanding your palate, however much of a foodie you are, you will find it a genuinely gastronomic experience.

Aloña Berri

Ulía Savories

Serves 10:

- 300 g (10.5 oz) finely chopped vegetables (onion, carrot, leek)
- 20 prawns
- 1 avocado
- 4 sheets filo pastry
- 2 dl (12 tbs/8 oz) leek sauce

Cook the chopped vegetables in a little oil until soft. Peel and slice the avocado. Divide up the pastry into 10 sheets of equal size, place an equal quantity of vegetables and avocado and two prawns on each and make into a little parcel. Deep fry the parcels and serve on a bed of leek sauce. Make sure that you cook everything as lightly as possible to keep the colors bright.

History

It is not easy to trace the history of the pincho with any degree of precision, but the phases of its development as a gastronomic phenomenon are worth looking into. Some food historians attribute its origins to a decree issued by Alfonso X (The Wise, 13th c.) to the effect that anyone serving wine should serve some food with it to mitigate its inebriating effect, but there seems to be little evidence for this. Others maintain that the tapa, close relation of the pincho, came into being as the result of a royal command that innkeepers should cover the mouths of wine jugs with a slice of bread to prevent flies getting in. They topped the bread with a slice of ham, thus creating the first edible tapa (the word means "lid" or "cover").
What seems more likely is that it simply emerged from the habit of chiquiteo, again to temper the effects of alcohol. The proliferation of drinking-places–bars, *tascas*, tabernas, *figones* and so on–before the Spanish Civil War created the habit of progressing from one bar to another within a locality. It is interesting to note that in the old days, customers in the many *sidrerías* (cider bars) throughout Guipúzcoa province were entitled to help themselves to a sardine from the grill.
The gastronomic brotherhoods (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 42) must also have been influential. They provided meeting places where their members could gather together for lunch or dinner, not to mention chatting, drinking, playing cards and the like, in an all-male environment. You would need to have something inside you to keep up the pace.
Conversely, of course, bars and inns helped the drink go down by serving herrings, bonito, sardines and anchovies from huge tins, as well as some little plates of tidbits such as

Food lovers can find at pincho level a variety and standard that would be difficult to rival.

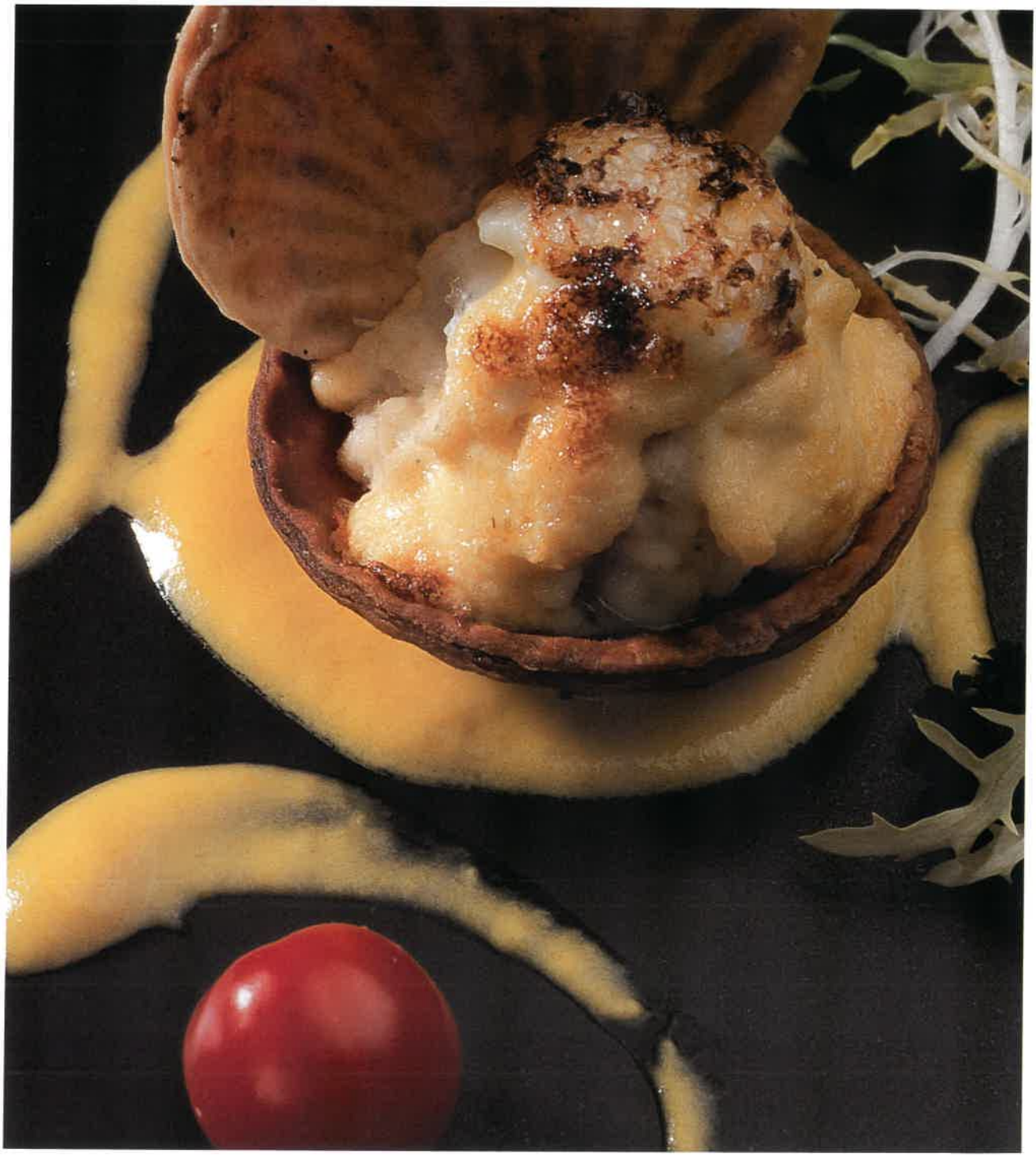
Aloña Berri

Salt Cod Brandade

Serves 10:

- 300 g (10.5 oz) salt cod, soaked
- 1 clove garlic
- 150 g (5 oz) potato puree, enriched with cream
- 10 quail's eggs, poached
- 1 dl (1 tbsp) hollandaise sauce
- 10 canapé-sized puff pastry bases

Cook the salt cod *al pil-pil* (frying it very slowly in oil with the garlic, giving the pan an occasional shake so that the fish juices emulsify with the oil to form a sauce). Remove skin and bones and flake the fish. Mix the fish into the potato puree and beat the mixture in the blender. Spoon equal amounts onto the 10 pastry bases, place a poached quail's egg on top of each, then pour some hollandaise sauce over the lot. Gratinate quickly under a hot grill before serving.



Everyone seems to agree that the first pincho was something known as *la gilda* (on the right).

canapés, *bacalao* (salt cod), olives, chilis. Dried salt cod, flaked so that one could eat it little by little gave one quite a thirst!

During the food shortages of the Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, and the hungry post-war years, a pincho was a luxury. Nevertheless it did survive as a snacking tradition though people tended to go for a *bocadillo* (baguette sandwich) which was more filling. As food became more plentiful, the range had to be extended. This is where the Basque Country's beloved *etxekoandres* (housewives) came into their own, installed in tiny kitchen-bars behind gingham curtains in the most unlikely corners, they demonstrated their culinary skills with delicious *tortillas* (potato omelets), *fritos* (fried delicacies), *ensaladillas* (Russian salads) and the like. The evolution of this sort of food into the pincho may well have been influenced by the entrees that some restaurants used to serve, consisting of up to 40 little dishes and eaten with cocktail sticks rather than cutlery.

Everyone seems to agree on one point, however, which is that the first pincho was something known as *la gilda*. This consisted of an anchovy preserved in oil, a pickled chili (nowadays they use several, of the non-hot variety) and a green unstoned olive, all skewered on a cocktail stick. Its contrasting flavors made it a huge success, and many bars still serve gildas today alongside much more sophisticated pinchos. The legend is that it was created in 1941 at the Bar Martínez by the parents of the brothers who currently run it and another bar called Ganbara. The owners were natives of La Rioja, and they brought in their (extremely hot) chilis from there and

Txoko de Ramiro

Prawn Puff Pastry Parcels

Serves 10:

- Puff pastry
- 10 peeled prawns
- 125 g (4 oz) wild mushrooms
- 125 cl (2.5 pints) single cream
- 1/2 small onion
- 1/2 clove garlic

Cut 10 squares of puff pastry, about 10x10 cm (4x4 in), and place a prawn on each. Make each square into a parcel by bringing the four corners together as if knotting a handkerchief, and bake them in the oven, preheated to 140-160°C (284-320°F), for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, soften the finely chopped onion and garlic in oil, then add the mushrooms and cook gently. Add the cream and allow to reduce, then pass through the blender to make a sauce to accompany the prawn parcels.

Txoko de Ramiro

Stuffed Eggplant with Spinach Sauce

Serves 8:

- 1 medium eggplant (aubergine)
- 8 slices bacon
- Boiled ham (cut into 8 circles)
- 8 strips cooked green pepper
- 8 squares Gruyere cheese
- Flour and egg for frying

For the sauce:

- 250 g (9 oz) spinach
- 0.25 l (9 fl oz) single cream

Cut the eggplant into 16 rings and make them into 8 "sandwiches" filled with the other main ingredients. Dip in egg and flour and deep fry. For the spinach sauce, cook the spinach and drain well, add the cream and allow to reduce, then whizz in the blender. This pincho can be served on a piece of toast or puff pastry with the sauce poured over.

from Loyola, Martutene, and Astigarraga. Their descendants suppose that the name came later, given it by customers in joky reference to the 1946 Glenn Ford and Rita Hayworth film *Gilda,* considered rather hot stuff at the time.

Another classic pincho which appeared at around this period consisted of hard-boiled egg, a prawn and an olive with a little mayonnaise–rather more delicate flavors and milder contrasts. You will still find this pincho today in nearly every bar, large or small, and it is the one that the *Cofradía del Pincho Donostiarra* (Pincho Brotherhood of San Sebastián) has adopted as its emblem.

The etxekoandres can be thanked for the success of cooked pinchos, served hot and reminiscent of entree dishes, and including, as well as those mentioned above, *chistorra* sausage, mussels in batter, stuffed peppers, savory croquettes, squid, and so on. From the 1960s on, the now traditional format of pinchos being displayed on plates on the bar became the norm, and chiquiteros knew where to find the best ones and which were whose specialties. Pinchos were becoming more and more delicious, more and more complicated, and more and more competitive.

A new factor came into play in the 1970s, with the rise of New Basque Cuisine. Its exponents were the likes of Luis Irízar (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 41), Juan Mari Arzak (see *Spain*

Gourmetour No. 42), and Pedro Subijana (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 16), to name the best known, and they were to revolutionize cuisine throughout Spain. Pincho "artistes" spotted a new opportunity: if cuisine as a whole was taking a new turn, then so would their branch of it. This was when two new trend-setting bars appeared in the quarter of Gros: Bergara and Aloña Berri, run by friends Joserra and Patxi. Inspired by a combination of competition with the bars of the Old Quarter,

The New Basque Cuisine phenomenon emerged in the pincho realm around 1984.

and a simple urge to innovate, they were hugely successful. Their pinchos didn't just taste good, they had presence, they were sophisticated, they attained a level that deserved to be described as *haute cuisine* in miniature. Others in a similar vein included the Juli, a bar in Rentería (just outside San Sebastián) and the Oiatz, now closed. These people, and those who kept the traditional recipes alive, are largely to be thanked for the current popularity of the pincho.

THE PINCHO BROTHERHOOD OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

Brotherhoods of this sort date back in their origins to the craftsmen's guilds of the Middle Ages whose members worked in the same trade or shared the same aims. Gastronomic brotherhoods were established in France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the oldest in Spain being established in the Spanish Basque Country some decades later. The doyen of these is the *Cofradía Vasca de Gastronomía* (Basque Gastronomic Brotherhood) which was founded in the early 1960s. in principle, they are non-profit making associations of people who support, defend and promote a product characteristic of their region or town. They have their own statutes, oaths of loyalty and respect, and distinctive regalia.

Their practical purpose is essentially social, providing a way of getting to know new people and places, sharing straightforward, jolly camaraderie, and eating and drinking very well indeed.

FECOGA (the Federation of Gastronomic Brotherhoods), whose headquarters is in San Sebastián, was set up to coordinate all the brotherhoods and to keep all their members informed about what is going on. Some 40 brotherhoods in France and Spain currently belong to FECOGA, affiliated membership being limited to those which fall within a given geographical area. Brotherhoods further away, such as L'Arros and La Toronja (devoted to rice and oranges) in Castellón, Jamón de Guijuelo (cured ham) in Salamanca, Queijo (cheese) in the Azores, Caldero (stew) in the Canary Islands, Aigua de Vichy (mineral water) in Vichy, and so on, link up by "twinning." There are brotherhoods devoted to the salmon, the anchovy, the *chistorra* sausage, wine, cheese, chacolí wine, maize, cider, blood sausage, asparagus, and many, many more products, including the unforgettable *Orden del Cuto Divino* (Order of the Divine Pig) in Tafalla (Navarre). It was in this context that the *Cofradía del Pincho Donostiarra* whose ambit embraces some 1,500 people, was founded in December 2001, to rectify the lack of recognition for this genuinely gastronomic product.

The uniform of the Pincho Brotherhood of San Sebastián –recently founded.

Many pincho bars have to employ highly qualified and specialized staff in their kitchens to create what they want to serve.

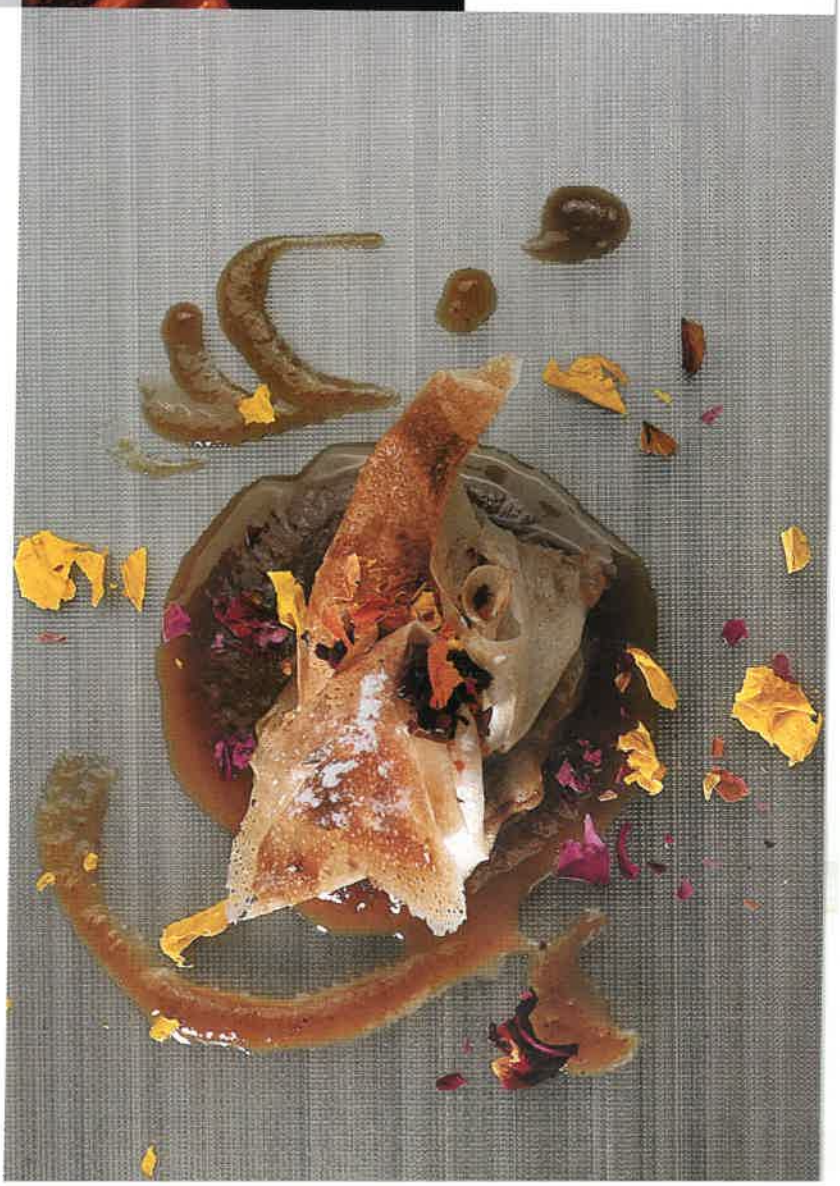
Munto

Foie Gras with Apple

Serves 1:

- 1 slice foie gras
- Apple compote
- Raspberry sauce
- Port wine

Place a little apple compote on a plate. Cook the slice of foie on a griddle, then place on top of the apple. Stir a shot of port wine into the raspberry sauce and drizzle over the foie.



Modern Pinchos

San Sebastián's Old Quarter has always had a special flavor. From the mid-19th century on, Queen Isabel II of Spain and her court spent the summer in this city; during the Restoration (1847-1902), it became established as the tourist destination for Madrid's upper middle classes. The city's architecture, especially that of the Old Quarter, still reflects that *"belle époque."*

When the Txofre bullring was demolished in 1973, the urban geography of Gros was changed radically. New customers had to be attracted to that part of town and in 1983 Patxi Bergara and Blanca Ameztoy in the revamped Bar Bergara, followed by José Ramón Elizondo and Conchita Bereciartúa at the Aloña Berri (a new bar which, in 1986, took its name from the old Aloña on Calle Rentería) set about doing this with their haute cuisine in miniature. Both establishments opted not to take the classical approach to pinchos but to create a range whose quality was superb and which embraced beautifully executed traditional cuisine while incorporating innovations in tune with the gastronomic transformation that was affecting the whole country. In this sense, New Basque Cuisine was fundamental to their approach.
Pincho sampling is matched by selecting drinks suited to what is being eaten, and the new wave has

Txepetxa

Anchovies with Trout Roe

Serves 10:

- 250 g (9 oz) cleaned anchovies
- 150 cl (3 pts) wine vinegar
- 150 cl (3 pts) cider vinegar
- 75 cl (1 1/4 pts) olive oil
- 75 cl (1 1/4 pts) sunflower oil
- Salt
- Trout roe
- Toast (enough for 10 small squares)

Marinate the anchovies for three hours in a mixture of cider vinegar, wine vinegar and a little salt. Fillet the fish, then place the fillets in a mixture of sunflower and olive oil for about two hours. Finally, place two or three anchovy fillets on each square of freshly made toast and top with trout roe.

coincided with an increased awareness of, and demand for, quality wines in Spain. There are now even pincho-based "degustation menus." When the New Basque Cuisine phenomenon emerged in the pincho realm around 1984, long-established traditional bars and restaurants revamped themselves entirely, turning their backs on the ordinary pincho repertoire of tinned or bottled goods, Spanish omelet, fried morsels and charcuterie, and trying out new creations. Bar Bergara was something of a pacesetter for this movement, effecting a radical change and giving itself over completely to the new culinary approach. It demonstrated consummate skill in creating new "miniature cuisine" recipes, incorporating attractive grace notes, giving the pincho counter visual appeal with stylish crockery, and all in all making a new art of the pincho and its presentation. The sort of pinchos created at this time included: *tortilla*

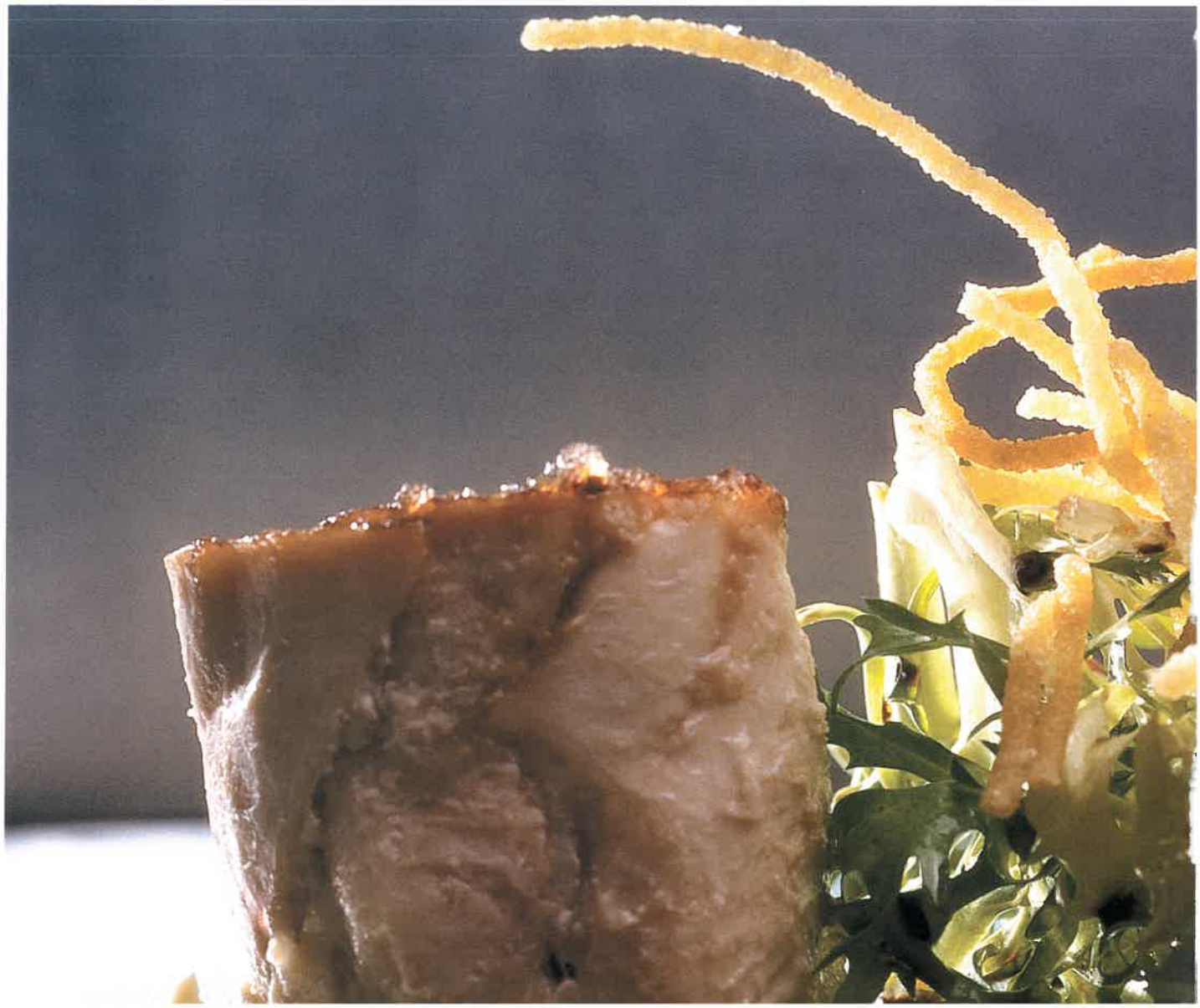
Patio de Ramuntxo

Free-range Chicken Filled with Caramelized Apple (2001 champion)

Serves 4:

- 1 chicken breast (about 200 g)
- 1/2 cooking apple
- Syrup made with 50 g (2 oz) sugar and 50 cl (16 1/2 floz) water
- A little extra sugar

Peel and slice the apple and cook it in the syrup to make a puree. Slit and open out the chicken breast and season with salt and pepper. Spread it with the apple puree, roll it up and tie with string. Cook in a hot oven for about 3 minutes: it should still be slightly underdone in the center. Cut into four rings, dip each in sugar (coating both surfaces) and complete the cooking by caramelizing them on a hot griddle.
Serve garnished with an escarole and rocket salad dressed with Modena balsamic vinegar, Maldon sea salt, almonds and olive oil and accompanied by a fried wheat semolina.



The pinchos served in many of San Sebastian's bars are not just a simple juxtaposition of different ingredients and flavors on a stick.

de anchoas (anchovy omelet), *bacalao al ajoarriero* ("muleteer-style" salt cod, i.e. with garlic and eggs), *revuelto de anchoas con pimientos de piquillo* (scrambled egg with anchovies and piquillo peppers), *chipirones enceboll-ados* (baby cuttlefish cooked with onion) and many, many more. The public took to them immediately.

Pinchos Win Prizes

In 1971, San Sebastián's Tourism Center launched an annual pincho competition: that year, the Pincho de Oro (Golden Pincho) award went to La Espiga, Aloña Berri coming second with its *lecheritas de ternera* (see recipe Veal sweetbread and Wild Mushroom Tartlet on page 28), a pincho they still make today, though now very different from that original: bread has now been replaced by filo pastry or crèpe. In 1989, the Cofradía Vasca de Gastronomía (see box, page 36) took over organizing the competition. That year, Bar Bergara won with its innovative *Cóctel Bergara* (Bergara Cocktail), whose fruit and seafood dressed in pink sauce represented quite a departure from the classic pincho.

Nowadays, the preparation time for a pincho has multiplied by three, and its composition has become equally complicated. Take, for example, Aloña Berri's *brandada de bacalao* (salt cod brandade): the cod is cooked with finely sliced garlic, as it would be in the initial stages of a bacalao al pil-pil. The skin and bones are then removed and the fish is flaked; potato puree is added in equal quantity and the mixture is then whizzed in the blender. Quail's eggs are then poached and placed on top of the cod mixture, which is then coated in hollandaise sauce, gratinated under the grill and presented at the bar in a tartlet.

Pincho Routes

Your pincho route should definitely start in the Old Quarter, specifically Calle Mayor. There we find Paco Bueno, the famous Casa Alcalde, Vergara (not to be confused with the one in Gros) and many more. Follow the curve of Calle Santa María round to Calle 31 de Agosto, a seriously gastronomic street full of societies, bars and seafood restaurants: Clery, in the alleyway which leads into the

Plaza de la Trinidad, Martínez (home of the gilda, but don't miss the *chatka* (crab), La Viña, La Cepa, La Cuchara de San Telmo, Gaztelu are just a few of them. Now turn into Calle Narrica. (If you've visited all those mentioned already, even if you've only had a little pincho in each of them, this is the time to stop, leaving the rest of the route for another occasion.) Veering slightly to the left, you come to Txepetxa, which specializes in anchovies: their delicious *anchoas con huevas de changurro* (anchovies with spider crab roe) is just one example of an astonishing range. Retrace your steps now, and enter the Plaza de la Constitución for Astelena, with its traditional pinchos, Tamboril, Ambrosio, Txistu and many more. Now to the port, where Portalón and Aralar offer huge selections of pinchos, turning back into town and behind the library for Ganbara, which serves excellent pinchos which capitalize on good prime ingredients: one glance at the trays of wild mushrooms on the bar tells you all you need to know about the approach here. Then on to Calle Fermín Calbetón, a long, busy street lined with bars and restaurants–there must be at least fifty, including Bartolo, Bodegón Donostiarra, Beti Jai, Munto, Borda Berri, Sport, Izkiña, Goiz Ardi. A visit to Cubi and Haizea on calle Aldamar rounds off the Old Quarter route.

In Gros there are two "zones." The essential one is the area around Plaza del Txofre, formerly the site of San Sebastián's bullring. On Calle Bermingham (sic!) are the two temples to the pincho mentioned earlier–Aloña Berri and Bergara. Both offer a full menu composed entirely of pinchos, with flavors ranging from delicate to robust to sweet, all served with marvelous matching wines. Could anyone ask for more?

Well, yes, actually... for nearby, on the left, is Txoko de Ramiro, and on the right, Urtxori-bi, a little further on, Jotxean; opposite, on Calle Arana, is Urkabe which serves the most gorgeous croquettes, then there's Bixente in another street. You see?–It goes on and on!

The other area is near the "cubes" designed by architect Rafael Moneo. This is also excellent pincho territory, with El Garbola, El Patio de Ramuntxo in the cubes themselves, and Kursaal, managed by three-Michelin-starred chef Martín Berasategui.

In the center of town, Basque, at the start of Avenida de la Libertad, is a relatively new bar with superb cuisine, alongside Iruaritz. As you head towards the quarter of Amara along San Marcial you will come to La Espiga (remember?) and Bodegón San Marcial. Then there's the bar in the Hotel Europa's cafeteria, and as you walk along La Concha beach, the bar in La Perla. Turn back now towards the cathedral, around which are Aloña Mendi, Iturrioz and Ibai. And behind the cathedral are Vallés and Alex, then Antonio on Calle Bergara. Amara, which is quite new, has Maruxa and La Venta de Curro which are non-local in tone, while

Pincho de Oro Prize Winners
1989: Bar Bergara with *"Cóctel Bergara"*
1991: Aloña Berri with Veal Sweetbread and Wild Mushroom Tartlet
1993: Aloña Berri with Salt Cod Brandade
1995: Aloña Berri with Pigeon Bastela
1997: Aloña Berri with *"Label"* Lamb
(In 1998, the ABE–Spanish Barmen's Association–took over organization of the competition)
1998: Txepetxa with anchovy *"a la jardinera"*
1999: Aloña Berri with Ulía Savories
2000: Izei with Pincho Izei
2001: El Patio de Ramuntxo with Chicken Filled with Caramelized Apple

Pinchos were becoming more and more delicious, more and more complicated, and more and more competitive.

Other Prizes:
2001: Bar Bergara wins the prize for Best Pinchos Bar of 2001 awarded at the *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía* (What's Best in Gastronomy) congress organized by Rafael García Santos, an influential food critic and author of the *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía* guide, published annually.

Bergara

"Muleteer-style" Salt Cod

Serves 8:

- 100 g (3 1/2 oz) salt cod, flaked and soaked
- 8 prawn tails
- 1 dl (1 tbsp) fresh tomato sauce
- 1 red pepper
- 1 green pepper
- 1 spring onion
- 50 g (2 oz) potato
- Olive oil
- 8 slices of baguette bread
- Strips of roasted green pepper for garnish

Chop the peppers and the spring onion very finely, and cook gently in oil until soft. Add the flaked cod, tomato sauce, and prawn tails. Cut potatoes into small cubes and fry them separately. Mix everything together over the heat and serve the mixture on slices of bread, garnishing with strips of roasted green pepper.

From the 1960s on, the now traditional format of pinchos being displayed on plates on the bar became the norm.

José Ramón Elizondo and Conchita Bereciartúa at the Aloña Berri

Osinaga, Udane and Agustín are very typically San Sebastián. And all the surrounding streets are full of bars. Paradoxically, the most modern are in the Antiguo Quarter: Danena and Lagunak on Calle Matía. In the newer part, Café de Mario lends a designer note, then there's Cervecería Konporta, and the R.K.
Forgive us if we go no further than San Sebastián for the moment. We think you'll agree that there's enough here to keep us going!

Gonzalo Nuin *is president of the Cofradía del Pincho Donostiarra (Pincho Brotherhood of San Sebastián).*
Juan José Lapitz *is honorary president of FECOGA (Federation of Gastronomic Brotherhoods), vice president of the Cofradía Vasca de Gastronomía (Basque Gastronomic Brotherhood), and a member of the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía (Basque Academy of Gastronomy).*

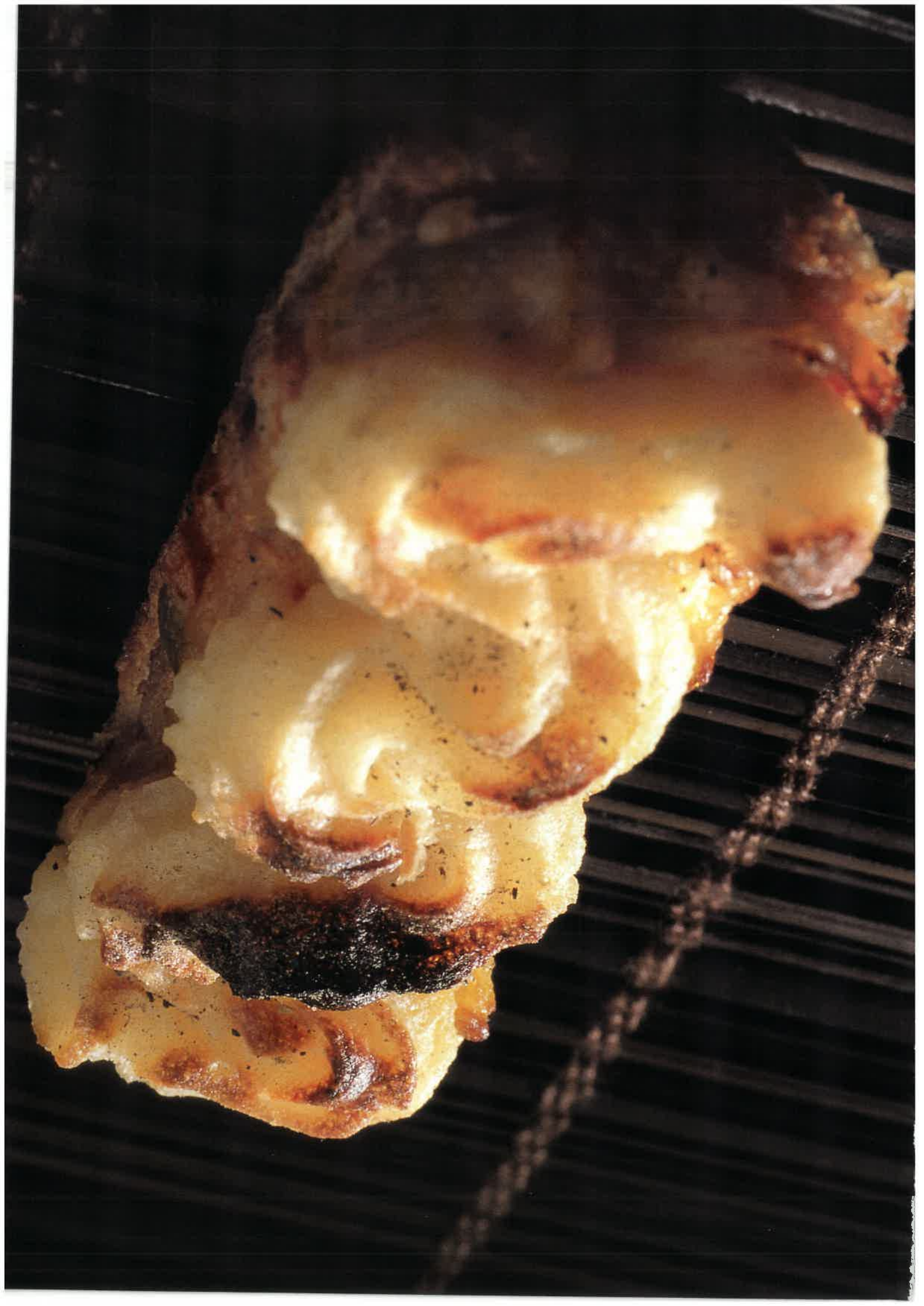
Bergara

Rainbow

Serves 12:

- 2 cod loin steaks
- 2 medium potatoes
- 1/2 red pepper
- 1/2 green pepper
- 1/2 zucchini (courgette)
- 1 onion
- Single cream
- Butter
- 4 large slices bread

Poach the cod with half the onion for 1 minute, then set aside. Fry the chopped peppers, zucchini and the remainder of the onion. Add 2 tablespoons cream, then set aside.
Meanwhile, cook the finely diced potato in a knob of butter and cream until soft, then whizz in the blender.
Cut the bread into 12 squares. Place some of the vegetable mixture on each a slice, then thin slices of cod, then some potato puree. Gratinate under the grill for 1 minute before serving.



TO READ & WEB SITES

Pinchos Donostarrias by Pedro Martín
(Pinchos of San Sebastián)
Published by Lur Argitaletxea

Pinchos & Tapas de la Cocina Vasca by J. García Salazar
(Pinchos & Tapas of Basque Cuisine)
Published by Hiria Liburuak

A Donostia de Pinchos; la Cocina Vasca en miniatura by Peio García Amiano
(Pincho-tasting in San Sebastián; Basque Cuisine in Miniature)
Published by Página, S.L.

Tapas y Pinchos de Donostia by Pedro Martín
(Tapas and Pinchos of San Sebastián)
Published by Ttarttalo

Donosti Pincho a Pincho by Pedro Martín
(San Sebastián Pincho by Pincho)
Published by Ttarttalo

De Pinchos por Donosti by Mikel Corcuera and J.M. Lopetegui Miralles
(Pincho-tasting Around San Sebastián)
Published by El País Aguilar, Madrid

El Libro de las Tapas para todas las Ocasiones by the Cocinova Team
(The Book of Tapas for Every Occasion)
Published by Vecci

Web sites

www.paisvasco.com/donostia
The official Web site of the San Sebastián City Council. It offers virtual tours of the city with information on cultural and tourism services, shopping, bars, restaurants, festivals and congresses, as well as maps. Also a tourism bulletin service for agencies and professionals. (Basque, English, French, Spanish)

www.gipuzkoa.net/turismo/
The Gipuzkoa Council Web site offering information on the different districts-transport, accommodation, sports, art and culture, festivals, gastronomy and routes. (English, Spanish)

www.aloinaberri.com
The Aloña Berri Bar's Web site with general information on cuisine in miniature and a selection of some of their tapas, the gastronomic awards they have received, their menu and wine list, the names of the bars staff and its location. (Basque, French, Spanish)

Bergara

Duck and Calvados Savories

Serves 12:

- 1 duck breast
- 3 small cooking apples
- 2 shallots
- 50 g (2 oz) butter
- 1 liqueur glass calvados
- 12 puff pastry cases
- Pine nuts for garnish

Sauté the duck in butter, then cut into small chunks and set aside. In the same pan, soften the chopped apple and shallot, then add the calvados and mix with the duck. Fill the puff pastry cases with the mixture, garnish with fried pine nuts and serve after gratinating under the grill for two minutes.

ADDRESSES OF THE MAIN BARS IN THEIR AREAS

Old Quarter:

Aralar
Puerto, 10
Tel: 943 426 378

Casa Alcalde
Mayor, 19
Tel: 943 426 216

Ganbara
San Jerónimo, 21
Tel: 943 422 575

Goiz Argi
Fermín Calbetón, 4
Tel: 943 425 204

Martínez
31 de Agosto, 13
Tel: 943 424 965

Munto
Fermín Calbetón, 17
Tel: 943 426 088

Txepetxa
Pescadería, 5
Tel: 943 422 227

Vergara
Mayor, 21
Tel: 943 431 073

Gros:

Aloña Berri
Bermingham, 24
Tel: 943 290 818
www.aloina.berri.com

Bergara
General Arteche, 8
Tel: 943 275 026
tapasbarBergara@eresmas.com

Garbola
Paseo de Colón, 11
Tel: 943 285 019

Joxean
Secundino Esnaola 39/41
Tel: 943 323 000

Patio de Ramuntxo
Peña y Goñi, 10
Tel: 943 321 661

Txoko de Ramiro
Txofre, 4
Tel: 943 279 799

Urtxori-Bi
Bermingham, 17
Tel: 943 277 395

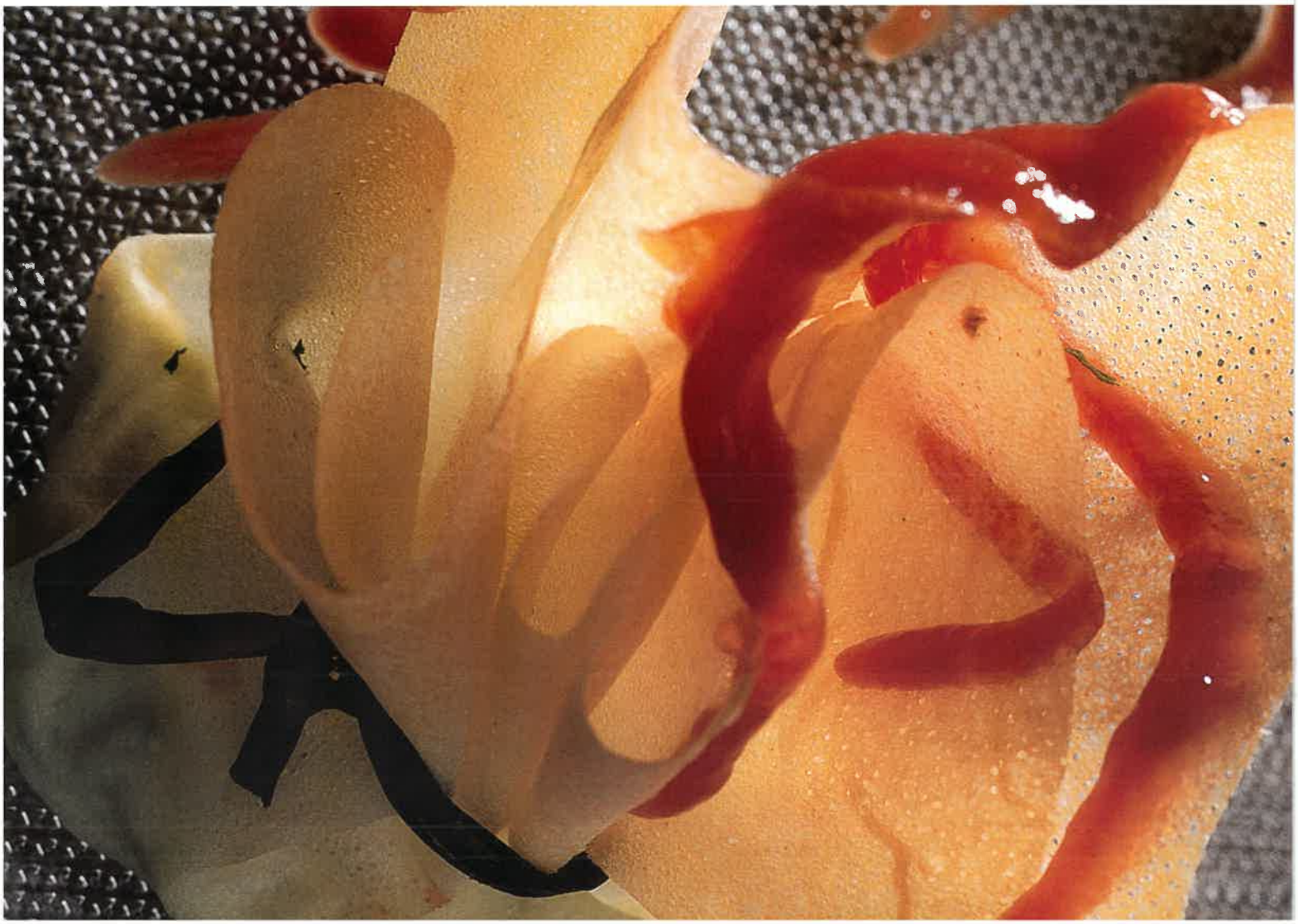
Other areas:

Izei
Baratzategi, 22
Tel: 943 279 391
Intxaurrondo

La Espiga
San Marcial, 50
Tel: 943 421 423
Centro

La Perla
Paseo de La Concha, s/n
(Edificio La Perla)
Tel: 943 462 484
Centro

RK
José María Sert, 2
Tel: 943 313 135
Antiguo



Celebration of

When foreigners visit Spain for the first time, one of the things that strikes them most forcibly–apart from the late hours we keep–is the amount of time we devote to eating and how interested we are in the whole subject. Leaning up against a bar sampling *tapas,* or seated at the table of the simplest or most sophisticated restaurant, a Spaniard is in his element. And what's more, the conversation during any meal is quite likely to be about gastronomic matters. Is this an obsession? A passion?... We'll leave that to the psychologists. What we do know is that, despite the new patterns and customs that are being absorbed inexorably at all levels–the workplace, the home, and so on–for the moment, eating is still much more than a nutritional issue in Spain.
This attitude has produced the many fiestas that punctuate the Spanish calendar in which food plays a leading role in one way or another. In some cases, the whole celebration revolves around a single product, such as the *chorizo* (star of several fiestas), or cherries; in others, the focus of the festival is a specific dish, such as *fabada* (Asturian bean stew) or *paella.* Many fiestas, while having a religious basis, culminate in the blessing of characteristic foodstuffs which are offered up to the saint whose feast-day it is.

Food

Part 1

Often related to the agricultural calendar, fiestas are held throughout Spain, but Asturias and, especially, Galicia in northwestern Spain are the regions with the most: Mariano García and Fina Casalderrey catalogue over 240 in their book *Festas gastronómicas de Galicia* (Gastronomic Festivals of Galicia). Some date back many centuries, such as Huéscar's fiesta in honor of San Antón (of which more later), whilst others are simply traditions that people have always known, such as the annual pig slaughter carried out in rural areas at the start of the cold weather with a view to producing sausages, hams and other charcuterie to last the whole year. Every member of the family played some role, and it provided the perfect excuse for a big fiesta.

Some are of more recent vintage; the fact that a couple of new fiestas are created every year suggests that they are in no danger of extinction. The way that the public responds to them suggests much the same thing: some fiestas attract enormous crowds, while others are more local in their appeal.

This new series takes a closer look at just a few of the many fiestas–some open air, some indoor, some hot weather, some cold–held all over Spain in celebration of food.

TEXT
GEORGE SEMLER

PHOTOS
NELSON SOUTO/ICEX

Heavenly Onions: Valls, Catalonia's Calçot Capital

Valls, 100 kilometers southwest of Barcelona, is the home of the *calçot,* a twice-planted, long-stemmed white onion, *allium cepa,* of the Liliacea family. Now officially *Ciutat d'Origen de la Calçotada,* Valls and the calçot, so-named for the protective stockings *(calçons)* of earth piled around the shoots as they grow out of the bulb, have become all but synonymous. Cooked over coals from grapevine cuttings and served on hot roof tiles with *romescu*-like *salbitxada* sauce, *butifarra* sausage, and the local *Ull de Llebre* (Tempranillo) young red wine, the calçotada has become a much-loved winter tradition in Catalonia.

Valls, named for the valleys (*valls,* in Catalan) formed by the mountains and streams of the Alt Camp, is also known for the human castles erected by the Xiquets de Valls, the most famous team of castellers who compete from June to late October constructing *castells,* 50-foot human towers. Built around squares named for traditional products like olive oil, wheat, garlic, carob, pottery, the town's landmark is Sant Joan Baptista's 74-meter belfry. Plaça del Blat's Casa de la Vila (Town Hall), dating from 1595, is the famous balcony up to which the Xiquets de Valls raise

their human castells. Down Carrer Major is the colorful ceramic-tiled façade of the Mercader store, home of Art Nouveau painter and silversmith Jaume Mercader Queralt. On Carrer de la Cort is the Renaissance façade of the Capella del Roser, with its 17th-century ceramic representation of the Battle of Lepanto, one of only two in Spain (the other is a painting in Madrid's El Escorial). Farther down Carrer de la Cort, past the 16th-century Casa de Santes Creus at No. 3, is the town's main square, El Pati, with its small bronze monument to the castellers, a man

with a boy on his shoulders, while past the square to the left is the Capella de San Roc, a Renaissance chapel with colorful ceiling paintings over the apse, now an exhibition gallery. At the end of Carrer de Jaume Huguet across the Font de la Manxa square is the Monument al Castells, a 50 foot stone carving honoring the Xiquets de Valls.

Over the last twenty years, the final Sunday of January has become the *Gran Festa de la Calçotada.* Some 30,000 visitors fill this picturesque country town of just over 20,000 inhabitants as the squares and streets become calçot and sausage roasting and tasting centers. Competitions for the finest calçots and the best salbitxada sauce are held in front of the Town Hall in the Plaça del Blat (wheat) while thousands of calçots cook in the Plaça de l'Oli (oil). In the town's main square, El Pati, a dainty *sardana* (Catalonia's folk dance) is followed by an epic calçot-eating contest. Meanwhile, the *cercavila,* or parade, circles town with its traditional giants and a 12-foot calçot, a troupe of eight-year-old dancers in Renaissance attire performing the *ball de la primera* (the first dance), followed by festively decorated horse-drawn carts and carriages.

The calçot and the calçotada go back just over a century to the time of a mysterious farmer named Xat de Benaiges, a solitary and contemplative Valls farmer who, after experimenting in his fields and kitchen, produced the first calçots around 1898.

The calçot begins life in December with the planting of the seed for the white onion. When the seed has grown to the size of a tennis ball, it is torn out of the earth, usually in May, and replanted in August, this time

only partly buried. As the shoots lengthen, they are progressively lined with soil to keep them from freezing. The harvest is between late November and late March.

An Alt Camp family event until about 50 years ago, the calçotada became known beyond Valls between 1946 and 1956 when the *Penya Artistica de l'Olla* (Artistic Club of the Pot) began to hold *calçotades artistiques,* inviting personalties from show business and the arts from Barcelona and beyond. The word spread and enterprising restaurateurs from around Valls began to offer calçotades. It became a fashionable rite of spring for winegrowers and landowners of the Penedés and Alt Camp to invite friends out to devour the long-stemmed onions and romescu sauce in the late-winter sunshine.

In 1995, the Generalitat de Catalunya established the denomination of quality "Calçot de Valls," limiting production to the counties of Alt Camp, Baix Camp, el Tarragonés, and the Baix Penedés. In September 2001, an IGP (Indicación Geográfica Protegida) protected the authentic calçot and defined its characteristics: 15 to 25 cm (6-10 inches) long with a diameter (measured 5 cm/2 inches from the root) of between 1.7 and 2.5 cm (1 inch), along with the correct consistency and taste and presented in bunches of 25 or 50 tied with the designated blue ribbon.

RESTAURANTS

Masía Bou
(tel: 977 600 427) This sprawling *masía* or noble farm house on the old road N 240 north to Montblanc sets up calçotades inside or outside.

Cal Ganxo
(Masmolets, tel: 977 605 960) Around an ancient olive press, two floors of dining rooms of every description serve calçots all winter.

Masía de Fontscaldes
(Fontscaldes, tel: 977 612 836) This old manor house serves classic calçotades and banquets.

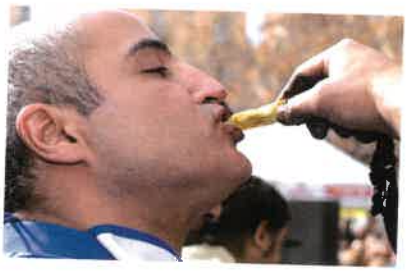
La Gran Festa

Every detail of the cultivation, preparation and consumption of the calçot has now become ritual. Fires are made of grape vine clippings, dried from the previous year's cutting. The calçots, cleaned and trimmed (never washed), are seared over flame, darkened evenly and wrapped in newspaper to steam. The moment for removing the calçots from the fire is critical, the moisture partly but not completely cooked out. The coals then cook the botifarra, *morcilla* (blood pudding), or lamb. Served on heated semi-cylindrically-curved red ceramic roof tiles, calçots are gripped with one hand by the blackened outside leaves while the other grips the middle stalks and slides the long-stemmed white onion out of its sheath. The calçot is then dipped into the sauce, raised overhead, and lowered home. Local Ull de Llebre red wine sprayed from the long-spouted glass *porrón,* completes the ritual. Meanwhile, the Gran Festa de la Calçotada fills the streets of Valls with a merry and slightly ribald crowd amid the ambrosial aromas of sweet onions and roasting sausage. At its heart a pagan and Rabelaisian celebration, combining the first rites of spring with a fresh return to life's earthier pursuits and pleasures, post-Christmas and pre-Lent, the calçotada never fails to provoke salacious innuendo and general hilarity. In Plaça del Oli, Josep Llorach's eyes twinkle as he explains how to cook, peel, dip and swallow a calçot. His blood-red, cock's crow-like, Catalan *barretina* jauntily raked forward, Llorach rubs his blackened palms across the cheeks of a pretty visitor to show that calçot ash leaves no mark, his official calçotada bib nonetheless nicely splashed with salbitxada, red wine, and botifarra juice. "It's an onion," he affirms, "...ninety percent water, cleans out the system; it's good for you!" while raising a porrón for another hit.

Recipes for the salsa de calçots are closely guarded secrets passed down from mother to daughter. Widely considered a romescu, the basic ingredients (almonds, hazelnuts, garlic, tomato, parsley, vinegar and olive oil) are universal, though the different mixtures and additives vary widely. Carme Vargas, of Masquefa's Nou Racó de la Queixalada restaurant near Martorell, winner of the 2002 sauce competition, uses the classic ingredients, mixes by hand with some assistance from the electric blender, and seeks a sharp taste with a fresh aftertaste. "The secret is less in the ingredients than in the elaboration," explains Carme Vargas. "The salbitxada must grab the calçot; the calçot must not come out of the sauce clean. The trick is to make a sauce that is correctly built up and bound together so that the elements don't separate, and this has more to do with the manner of mixing than with the ingredients. I use almonds, roasted tomatoes, roasted garlic, *ñora* (dried red pepper), slightly refined olive oil, ground *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain), salt and vinegar."

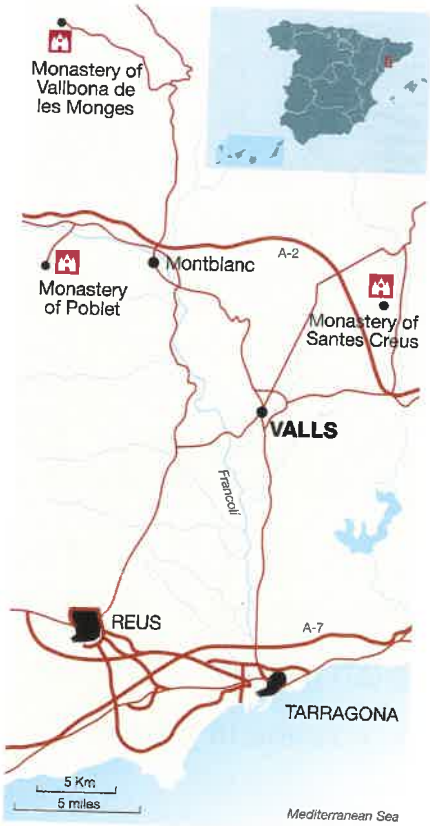
Second prize winner Maria Escarré of Valls (first prize in 1999), mixes almonds, hazelnuts, roast tomato, roast head of garlic, a small amount of raw garlic, pimentón, shredded ñora, oil, salt, vinegar, and parsley using three tomatoes for every 200 grams of almonds.

The 2002 calçot-eating contest was won by a 27-year-old newcomer from Barcelona, Adrià Wegryzyn (pronounced "Wertzin") who swallowed 198 calçots in 45 minutes for a total of two kilos, 490 grams. Second place went to Ramón Forès of Valls with 273 calçots and two kilos, 380 grams. The winning score is determined by subtracting the weight of the leftover stalks from the total weight served each of the 20 contestants. Forès, the record holder with three kilos, 185 grams based on 190 calçots devoured in 1997, is famous in Valls for sitting down for a big (albeit onionless) lunch after the calçot contest.



In Valls the calçot, *"molt mes que una ceba"* (much more than an onion), is a culture that has exploded from a family phenomenon in the 50's to today's annual production of over 31,000,000 calçots. As cineast Bigas Luna expressed it: "The calçot, the porrón, and the castellers, three things that are ours that have always fascinated me. They rise up from the earth and make me look at heaven."

Born and educated in the United States, writer and journalist ***George Semler*** *has lived in Spain over the last 30 years. During that time he has written on Spain, the Pyrenees, France, North Africa, and the Mediterranean region for the* International Herald Tribune, *the* Los Angeles Times, Forbes, *and* Saveur *as well as publishing his own walking guides to Madrid and Barcelona.*



THE CISTERCIAN TRIANGLE

The trio of Cistercian monasteries at Poblet, Santes Creus, and Vallbona de les Monges forms a nearly equilateral triangle north of Valls. Near Poblet, the town of Montblanc is another important visit along this route. Catalonia's third city (after Barcelona and Tarragona) in medieval times, Montblanc is surrounded by northeastern Spain's best 14th-century walls.

Named for *Citeaux* (in Latin, *Cistercium),* where the order was founded by Saint Robert in 1098, the Cistercian monks reacted against the Cluniac order and sought to recover the ideals of the early Benedictines. The life and writings of St. Bernard were their guiding influence. Cistercians considered farming the proper activity for a monastic life of seclusion, thought, and prayer. They developed new agricultural techniques throughout Europe, and, in Catalonia were known for their wine-growing expertise.

Vallbona de les Monges was continuously occupied by Cistercian nuns since 1157. Perhaps as a result of its more remote location and its history of nearly one thousand years of prayer

and concentration it seems more intimate and moving than its more splendid brothers at Poblet and Santes Creus. The patchwork cloister with elements from different eras is charming as is the octagonal lantern over the church's transept.

Santes Creus can be reached cross-country from Vallbona de les Monges on tortuous but scenic back roads. The most esthetically perfect of the three monasteries, the views and surroundings are pristine, while the main cloister, the chapter hall and the tombs of Pere II (1276-85), Jaume II (1291-1327) and the great Catalan sea captain and warrior Roger de Llúria are haunting reminders of Catalonia's past power in the Mediterranean.

Poblet, one of the masterpieces of Iberian monastic architecture, is the most muscular and splendid of the three Cistercian monasteries. The combination of lightness and immensity is stunning, especially when the afternoon sun sculpts deep shadows into the monastery's ochre sandstone façades. Founded in 1151, the cloister's Gothic tracery and Romanesque capitals are striking, as are the Plaza Mayor outside, the Capilla de Sant Jordi, and the Royal Pantheon established by Pere III (1336-87). Most of the Catalan-Aragonese count-kings are interred here, including Joan II (1458-79) father of Fernando el Católico, who with his 1474 marriage to Isabella I of Castile, took the Crown of Aragon (which included Catalonia) into union with Castile and León to create the modern Spanish state.

TEXT AND PHOTOS
PABLO AMATE/ICEX

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

Fun, Food and Fireworks

This ancestral fiesta dates from way, way back and exemplifies the way in which Spain's Arab heritage and Christian customs intertwine, the quintessence of each finding expression in good food.

Granada and its region make a big event of celebrating the feast of San Antón, an ancient, and at heart gastronomic, festival whose culinary content varies depending on where in the province it is celebrated. Considerable distances can separate place and place within this big province, and these in turn show evidence of their proximity to other ethnic influences. Hence the singular mixture and variety that surround the festival dedicated to this originally French anchorite monk and patron of animals.

A deeply religious man, he embraced self-denial and elected to live as a recluse in the desert. There, his saintly abstinence was put to the test by temptations in the form of visions of food, the most frequent apparition, according to legend, being a juicy piglet. Thence the tradition of depicting San Antón with a piglet at his feet.

On the night of 16 January, and through to the early hours of the following day, the inhabitants of northern Granada Province, in Huéscar specifically, gather round bonfires known as *castillos* (castles) and sing this verse:

San Antón, santo francés
Santo que no bebe vino
Y lo que lleva en los pies
San Antón y su cochino

which translates roughly as:

San Antón, a French saint
A saint who drinks no wine
And what has he at his feet?
San Antón has his swine

Now for a closer look at what is essentially two fiestas in one. Despite being dedicated to the same saint and celebrated in the same province, considerable differences exist between the northern versions of this fiesta and those elsewhere in Granada.

Castles in Huéscar

By the evening of 16 January, Huéscar is abuzz with activity, especially outside the 24 houses in the town where the members of the *Hermandad de San Antón* (San Antón Brotherhood) live. The Brotherhood's

colación (collation) consisting of walnut buns, fried pork muzzle, toasted chick peas, sausages such as *chorizo* and *morcilla,* and good homemade bread, all washed down with invigorating local wine.

The Saint in Galera

The town of Galera, not far from Orce and Huéscar, pays its own tribute to this gastronomic saint. It does so rather differently, with festival traditions dating from the 17th century. The event is launched on 15 January with the ritual *entrada del cajero* (arrival of a kind of inofficial treasurer, who gathers money to celebrate the fiesta) and from then on until the 18th, brotherhood members sound reveilles and retreats on bugle and drum each dawn and dusk. Fanfares and the sight and sound of rockets and firecrackers punctuate the next few days. The procession ends up at the house of a Brother, where everyone sits around the fire to enjoy local dishes such as pork and charcuterie in various guises, Segura lamb chops, and young local wine. On the 17th and 18th, the multicolored flag is paraded at the door of the hermitage dedicated to San Antón.

Olla de San Antón

The Duke of Alcalá Afán de Ribera (1584-1637, viceroy of Naples and ambassador to the court of Pope Urban) once described the stew known as *la olla de San Antón* (San Antón's pot) as Granada's national dish, a judgment doubtless based on its popularity in the city of Granada and many of the towns and villages round about and in the Alpujarras. It is an unvarying tradition each 17th of January for groups of friends, workmates and associates of all kinds to sit down together to a feast of olla de San Antón. This hearty, rib-sticking dish uses parts of the pig's carcass which have been preserved in salt alongside the larger pieces, such as hams and shoulders. The classic ingredients are: tail, ribs, spine, muzzle and ear, accompanied by dried beans, rice and fennel. The actual olla is an earthenware pot, and the dish is ideally cooked over a wood fire. In earlier times, this would have been done out of doors during a *romería*–a festive pilgrimage–near the river Genil, which flows down from the heights of the Sierra Nevada, after a blessing of the neighborhood's animals by the San Antón hermitage's parish priest. While the pilgrims lit a fire for cooking and erected swings for the children and marriageable girls, funny songs full of double entendre and jokes about relations between the sexes would be sung. When it was time to eat, the stew would be served up with hot pickles and young must-wine, just ready for drinking at that time of year. The countless groups of friends who sit down to the fiesta's traditional dish either in the restaurants of neighboring towns such as Cájar, La Zubia, Huétor Tajar and Monachil, or in family homes, are the modern-day equivalent.

***Pablo Amate** is a journalist, gastronomy and wine critic. He is member of the Academia Española de Gastronomía (Spanish Gastronomic Academy) and Expert in Gastronomy, Enology and Nutrition (University of Granada).*

D.O. Priorato

Shades of BURGUNDY

The *Denominación de Origen* (D.O.) Priorato has experienced one of the most spectacular turnarounds of any wine-producing area in the world. In just ten years, it has soared from depression to stardom, and is now on its way to becoming Spain's answer to Burgundy.

Àlvaro Palacios tasting one of his wines

TEXT
ANDRÉS PROENSA

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
RAFAEL VARGAS/ICEX

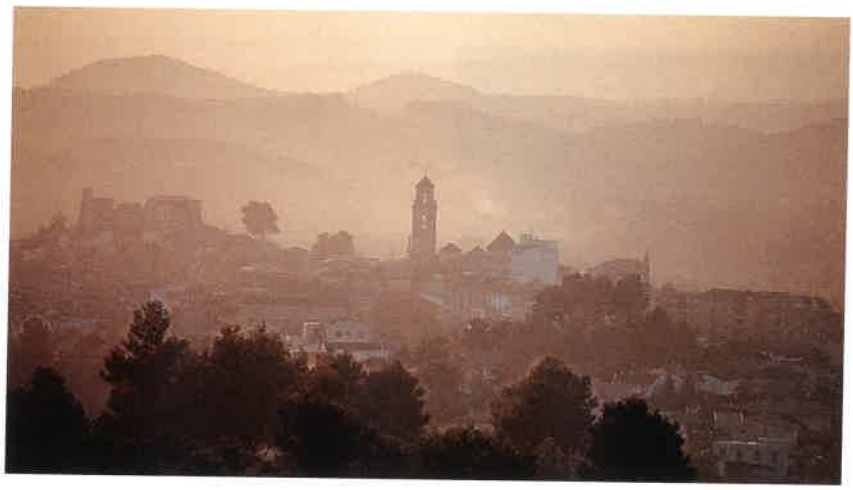
Terroir awareness, small vineyards very different amongst themselves, a large number of small wineries devoted to just a few vineyards, even brand names featuring the term "clos," are all evocative of wine production in Burgundy. The image is reinforced by the prestige and prices now associated with the wines produced in a wine-growing area which until ten years ago, despite being officially recognized as privileged, just could not get going. It needed a magic touch.

In 2001, D.O. Priorato applied for Spanish wine's superior controlled appellation, it would thereby become, after Rioja, the country's second D.O.C. (*Denominación de Origen Calificada*, see Glossary on page 127). This demonstrates the magnitude of a transformation process whose effects are being felt throughout wine-growing Spain, and particularly in Catalonia. Many wine-growing areas are taking Priorato as their benchmark in their approach to renewal, and in some cases experts from Priorato wineries exert direct influence in those areas, either as winemakers or as consultants to wineries on aspects of viticulture or viniculture. The Priorato "philosophy" of wine growing, winemaking, aging and even marketing is exportable to other regions of Spain. This is quite a change for an area which used to hide its enormous potential very much under a bushel. When a FAO (the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization) delegation conducted an in-depth analysis of Priorato's quality factors in the 1960s, its findings were that it possessed all the necessary qualities for making the best wines in the world. This seemed to fall on deaf ears, however, since but for a few sporadic exceptions, Priorato continued to pursue the same uninspiring course pursued by many of the areas which are enjoying revival today: supplying the bulk market, where wines with plenty of color, body and alcohol always find a welcome. Despite the FAO findings, Priorato wine stayed within its dull traditional confines.

Priorato in Times of Scala Dei

Priorato (the word means priory) was once a genuine feudal domain, owned by the Carthusian Scala Dei Priory until the *desamortización*, or compulsory privatization, of ecclesiastical properties in the 19th century. Ownership of the priory's estate was then shared out among a few families, becoming fragmented over time into smaller plots of land in the hands of local peasant farmers. Along with the typically Mediterranean crops of olives and nuts (almonds and hazelnuts), grapes were the most widespread crop cultivated in this area's irregular terrain. Grape growing was enormously problematic, and for many years the harvest ended up at local cooperatives. With most of the production being sold in bulk at prices too low to provide families with a guaranteed livelihood, people were forced to emigrate to nearby industrial zones or to commute daily to work in neighboring areas.

In those circumstances, for wine to be bottled was very much the exception. The co-ops bottled only small lots of wines that had not sold in bulk, thus creating a curious paradox: bulk wine dealers selected the best lots, for which they recouped their money relatively quickly, while the poorer quality wines were sold to the public direct at the winery either



in small quantities as bulk or, in still smaller quantities, in bottles. The one exception was Cellers de Scala Dei, a family-run winery established in 1974, which focused on what was best about Priorato and gave it expression in some memorable vintages such as 1976 and others during the 1980s. But these wines were at odds with their time to the extent that the bodega was obliged to adapt its output to conform to more commercially viable standards. Even so, they were undeniably harbingers of what was to come later.

A New Order

The new wave began in 1989, triggered by René Barbier and a group of friends. The Barbier family has a long tradition of involvement in Catalan winemaking. René's great-grandfather, León Barbier, moved to Catalonia from France in 1870 and acquired smallholdings in various parts of the region. René's grandfather, also called René Barbier, founded the eponymous wine brand, which is now part of the mighty Freixenet Group. As time went by, the family gave up wine growing as such, but remained in the wine business. During the 1980s, René Barbier was export manager of Bodegas Palacios Remondo, a D.O.C. Rioja winery, which was how he got to know Álvaro Palacios and some of Priorato's current producers. He still owned some of the family land in Priorato and was something of a visionary in proclaiming how excellent conditions in the area were for making great wines. He eventually convinced four of his friends of this and together they embarked on a venture that was to transform Priorato wines and plant the seeds for a whole new generation of Catalan wines and winemakers.

The five prophets of Priorato's new order launched their venture with the 1989 vintage: they were Dafne Glorian, the wife of an important American wine dealer, Álvaro Palacios from Rioja, Josep Lluís Pérez Verdú, a lecturer at the Falset School of Viticulture and Enology, Carles Pastrana, a childhood friend of René Barbier, and René Barbier himself. They made their wines together and marketed them individually with their own brands: Clos Erasmus, Clos Dofí (later renamed Finca Dofí), Clos Martinet, Clos de l'Olbac and Clos Mogador.

WEB SITES

www.wwwinecellar.com/poboleda.html

The Priorato and other Catalonian D.O. wines, with information on vineyards, links, books and how to order. (English)

www.altanet.org/consells/priorat/consorci-priorat/

The Web site for the Priorato products consortium. Includes the data base for wines and other products. Information on each Priorato wine according to grape type: labels, product description, grape varieties, bottling, production, guide to prices, company or owner name, place of production, sales and method of contact. (Spanish, Catalan)

www.filewine.es/priorato.htm

General description of the Priorato district with information on the following wineries: Álvaro Palacios, Clos Mogador, Eric Solomon, Mas Martinet, Amadís, Cims de Porrera Classic. Also information on crop years, vintages, wine types, grape types, alcohol content, area of production, producers, prices, tasting information and dates. (Spanish)

THE ANSWER LIES IN THE LLICORELLAS

Altitude, orientation and vine age are fundamental elements in the configuration of Priorato's modern wines. However, what makes the greatest contribution to their personality is the soil. Although neighboring areas also contain similar patches, soil was the decisive factor in defining Priorato's production area when the D.O. was established in 1954. Stony soils derived from degraded slate constitute what are known locally as *llicorellas:* soils which are very low in nutrients, healthy and well drained, while forming a layer which impedes the evaporation of water that finds its way in. Additionally, the stony areas of little-eroded rocks accumulate heat during the hot days and retain it during the cold nights of the maturation period.

Most of Priorato's vineyards are planted in the llicorellas, both in the low-lying parts as well as on its steep slopes. Hillside sites are planted in one of two ways, either in terraces supported by stone walls, or, more traditionally, directly on the slope in what are known as "costers," now much sought-after. Terracing makes it possible to mechanize some cultivation tasks, to use the espalier system and, sometimes, to install drip irrigation. Furthermore, terraces retain a certain amount of rainwater. For all these reasons, most of the area's newly planted vines are in terraced sites.

The costers vineyards are the oldest in the area; they are sometimes on slopes so steep that working the soil, pruning and harvesting are extremely challenging. The costers retain only minimal amounts of rainfall, which flows freely downhill, and this makes for very low yields (sometimes 1,000 kilos per hectare, the equivalent of one kilo per plant, and sometimes less) but high concentration. The difficulties posed by the terrain are compounded by a tough climate that is dry (rainfall, between 550 and 600 mm a year, is very unevenly distributed, almost always arriving in the form of violent rainstorms–fierce enough to demolish some terraces two years ago) and whose Mediterranean characteristics are much tempered by the altitude (from 200 to nearly 1,000 meters above sea level) and by dry cold winds from the north. The summers are very hot and the winters cold though not over-long, with late frosts a moderate risk. The landscape of this area of Catalonia is extraordinarily beautiful, its dramatically accidented terrain structured around the course of the River Siurana which winds its way southwards from the mountains of the Montsant massif down to its confluence with Ebro. The terraces, where vines, olives and almonds are grown, make the hillsides look like something out of Ancient Egypt. These typically Mediterranean crops are interspersed with typical scrubland flora, rich in aromatic plants.

Although Priorato enjoys a combination of exceptional conditions for growing high quality grapes, as was recognized by the FAO commission almost half a century ago, its production could hardly be said to be abundant. The tough conditions in most of the vineyard sites have offered no option but to adopt very rustic varieties that withstand the most extreme conditions. Garnacha in its three incarnations (Blanca, Tinta and Peluda) is the area's predominant variety, but even this sometimes fails to thrive in the poor soils of the costers, where its place is taken by the even more resilient Cariñena. These are the grapes that give modern Priorato wines their character, with an initial boost from Cabernet Sauvignon, a little Merlot and the fashionable warm-zone variety, Syrah, also brought in quite early on. In the field of white wines, experiments with Chardonnay do not seem to have met with much success, but there are very interesting examples, such as René Barbier's Clos Nelin, in which varieties such as Viognier are involved. In general, Priorato whites aim to capture the personality of the recalcitrant Garnacha Blanca with its scrubland aromas, either on its own or in combination with other varieties such as the French ones mentioned above, locals Xarel.lo and Picapoll, and Pedro Ximénez, the exotic variety so typical of the great sweet wines of Andalusia and grown in Priorato for many years.

The new bodega of Álvaro Palacios in Gratallops.

The early days were by no means straightforward. They came up against the limitations imposed by sharing premises equipped only with the basics. And they came up against bureaucracy: having brought in "foreign" varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah (they also pioneered Syrah in Spain), which were not authorized for use within the D.O. Priorato, they were at one point excluded from the Denomination of Origin. Paradoxically, as so often, the best wines to come out of D.O. Priorato were disqualified from bearing its name. Price posed another serious difficulty: at around 3,000 pesetas (18 euros) a bottle ten years ago, when a Rioja *gran reserva*, still considered the nonpareil of Spanish wine, was fetching barely 2,000 (12 euros) and even Vega Sicilia "Único" cost under 10,000 (60 euros), Priorato wines seemed outrageously expensive.
All these difficulties subjected the venture to serious pressure, and in 1992 the five musketeers went their separate ways, all except for Dafne Glorian who continued under the protective mantle of René Barbier until just a few months ago–she has now bought Álvaro Palacios' old winery, set up in a former cinema in Gratallops. After unrewarding beginnings, the "clos" emerged as the great revelation of Spanish wine of the Nineties. Allied with the irrepressible rise of Ribera del Duero's reds, they injected new life into a Spanish wine scene dominated by classic Riojas. Indeed, the model was beginning to be replicated in Rioja itself, with the likes of Barón de Chirel, Dominio de Conté, Torre Muga and San Vicente pioneering the "new Riojas."

The Second Generation

The example soon spread within Priorato itself, too. The first generation of "clos" was joined by a second, the majority of whose key figures were graduates of the Falset School, a veritable hothouse for young winemakers, who had been trained by teachers of the caliber of Josep Lluís Pérez Verdú and Joan Assens and honed in the wineries of the five pioneers. New wines, such as Gran Clos, Fra Fulcó and Pasanau, were created. Meanwhile, the fact that already established brands were thriving created a situation in which there was competition for fruit from the old vineyards on Priorato's terraces and "costers" (see box, page 62). This struggle wrought change in the cooperatives in more ways than one: on the one hand they lost some of their members who left either to sell their grapes at good prices or to set up their own wineries. On the other, some new ventures depended on working in collaboration with the cooperatives, providing the cooperative and its members with technical advice on matters of both winemaking and growing in exchange for selecting grapes for their own wines. This was the approach adopted for Mas Igneus, created in conjunction with the Poboleda cooperative by Josep María Pujol-Busquets and Josep María Albet y Noya, winemakers from Parxet (Alella) and Penedés, respectively, and for Cims de Porrera, joint product of the Porrera cooperative and the Pérez Verdú family (Clos Martinet), Catalan singer-songwriter Lluís Llach, whose mother was a native of Porrera, and notary Enric Costa.

From top to bottom: Carles Pastrana with his wife; Josep Lluis Pérez; René Barbier.

We are talking here of the late Nineties, and the third generation of Priorato wineries. This period saw big investment from outside the area itself, and also saw small wineries supplied by family vineyards, generally small scale and for the most part owned by local life-long winegrowers, either severing their links with the cooperatives or resuscitating plantations which had been virtually abandoned at a time when they offered meager return.

One of the first "outsiders" on the scene was Miguel Torres, who instigated a spectacular terraced plantation high on a hillside in Porrera. Freixenet's involvement was through its participation in Viticultors del Priorat, a company started by former Agriculture Minister Luis Atienza, among others. Not to be outdone, Codorníu bought an important holding in Cellers de Scala Dei. Big Penedés wine dealer, Pere Rovira, acquired the former Masía Barril to create the flourishing Viticultors Mas d'en Gil. Lluis Llach, meanwhile, started his own personal venture with Vall Llach, one of the most important new brands in Spain in 2001.

Myriad new wines from very small wineries have been appearing alongside these, examples being Joan Sangenís Juncosa's excellent white, and the wines of Sangenís y Vaqué, Celler del Pont and Celler Mas Doix. One outstanding example is the superb Clos Manyetes, product of a vineyard so "poor" that Cariñena is the only variety that can be grown there; this wine is made by Belgian Luc Can Oseghem, another of René Barbier's friends and proprietor of a small country hotel in Falset. He bought his vineyard at the time when it represented an act of faith, but did not get round to making wine (or, rather, having René Barbier make it) until the '99 vintage.

Priorato Today

In the course of all this, the very look of Priorato's towns and villages has changed. The success of its wines has brought an unaccustomed prosperity to an area that was unquestionably the most depressed in Catalonia. The price of grapes, at around two euros per kilo one of the highest in Spain, has put hard work in the steep hillside vineyards into a whole new perspective. Vine growing is now profitable, and many people are restoring their old vineyards, rebuilding the terraces, restoring the now prestigious "coster" vineyards, and planting anew. Migration has slowed down: many who left are coming back, and the daily exodus to industrial jobs in Mora d'Ebre, Falset, Reus and Tarragona has stopped. In fact, the pattern has been reversed, with the building, or rebuilding, of wineries and homes making it necessary to bring in building workers from outside the area.

Priorato's golden age, perhaps the first it has enjoyed since the monks settled there almost a thousand years ago, has had repercussions beyond its boundaries. Such is the resonance of what one might call the "Priorato Effect" that, in combination with the efforts of ecological activists and the inhabitants of neighboring areas, it has succeeded in preventing the construction of a power station which would have posed a threat to the entire ecosystem of southern Tarragona. In strictly vinicultural terms, the effects are undeniable.

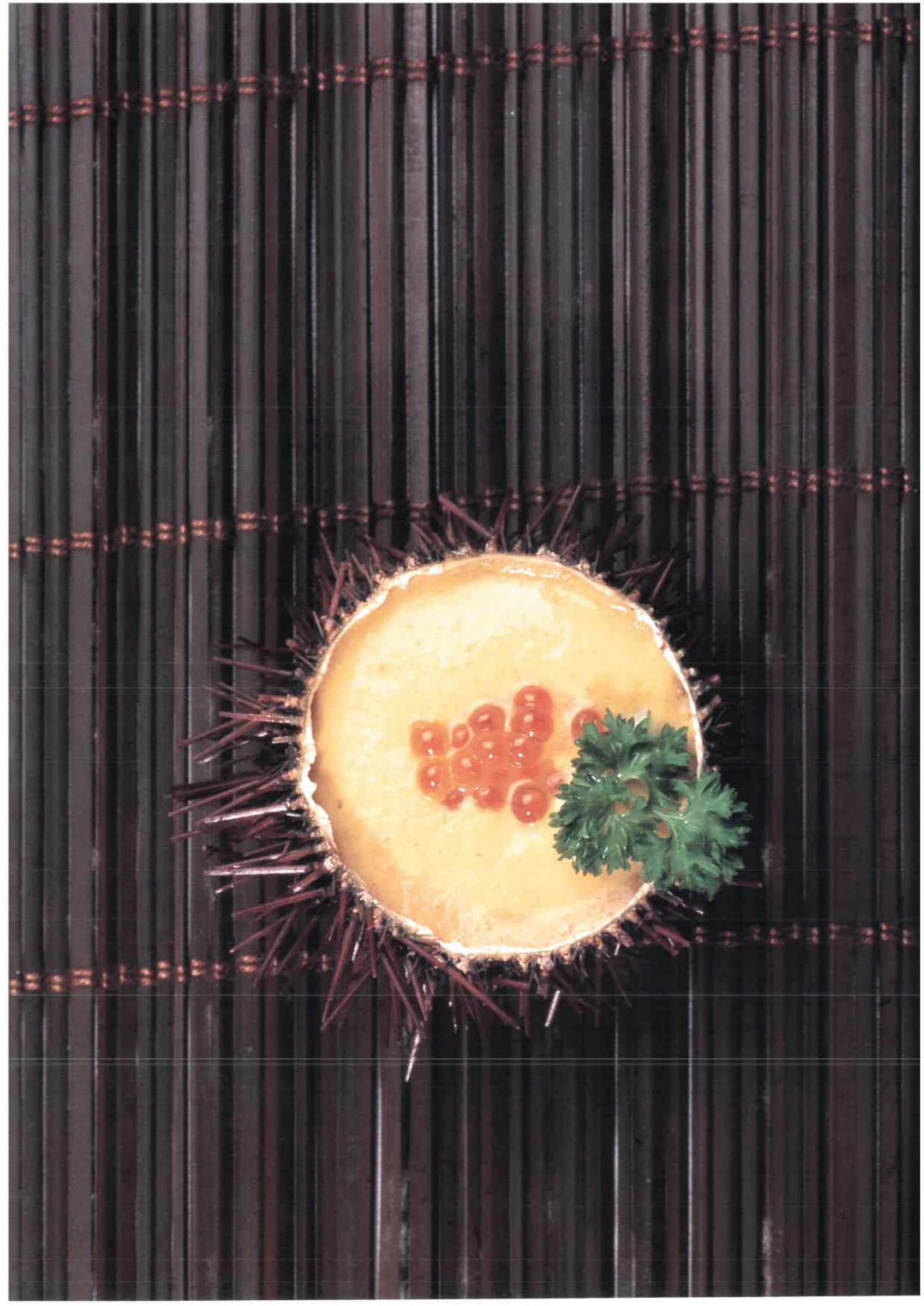
The presence of a whole new order is palpable in Catalan wines, and there is a new generation of young winemakers, nearly all products of the Falset "nursery" fine tuned by working in the Priorato wineries. They are effecting change in the wines of such areas as Terra Alta, even Penedés as far as its reds are concerned, the relatively distant D.O. Ampurdán-Costa Brava, and others outside the region. The new generation also includes the offspring of some of the original pioneers, such as René Barbier junior and, particularly, Sara Pérez Ovejero, daughter of Josep Lluís Pérez Verdú, something of a human dynamo whose area of influence embraces Spain's Mediterranean coast and the Balearic Islands but who still finds the time to launch a project of her own in the future D.O. Montsant under the Venus label.

The here and now of Priorato is reflected in the landscape by the proliferation of new vineyards and by the cranes that mark the sites of wineries under construction, like flags signaling its new prosperity. As for its wines, there is a constant stream of new brands, a phenomenon destined to last for several years yet. Meanwhile, the pioneer wines are being consolidated, developed and, it would be true to say, gradually refined; for the most part, they are standing up well to the test of time, thereby removing one of the question marks which hovered over them. And in addition to all the new initiatives, there are still the special wines made in longer-established wineries. L'Ermita, one of Spain's most prestigious wines, casts a very long shadow.

Andrés Proensa is a journalist who specializes in wine-writing.

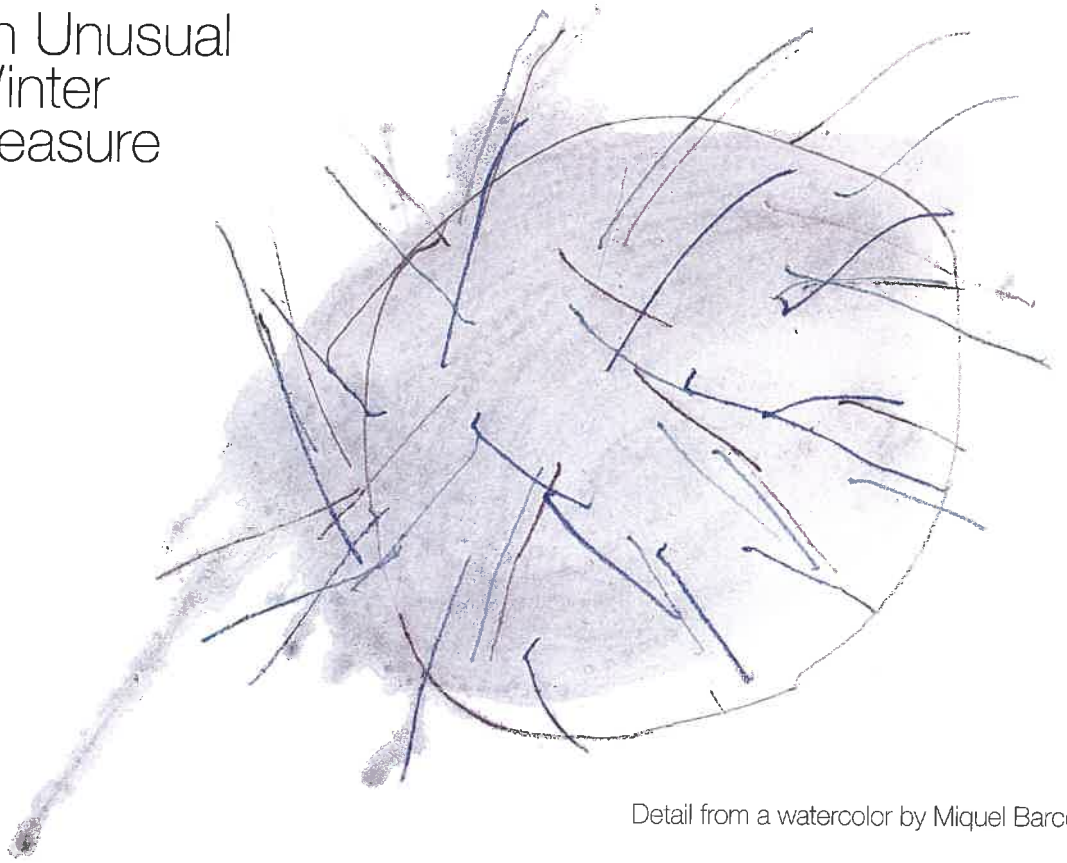
Exporters on page 109

The old Priory of Scala Dei



SEA URCHINS

An Unusual Winter Pleasure



Detail from a watercolor by Miquel Barceló

One may wonder who first came to the daring idea to embrace this aloof sea creature as a source of both sustenance and delight, but since times immemorial the sea urchin has been on the menu of many a people all around the world. That it has remained a rarity, a privilege for locals and true gourmets, has probably more to do with the fact that getting it from its inter-tidal habitat to your table has quite some "spines" attached. By many considered more enticing than oysters, the sea urchin is slowly becoming a *pièce-de-résistance* on the hibernal hit list of a number of celebrated chefs. But while its prime time is rather short, new simple preserving methods that barely alter the sea urchin's original characteristics now make this unusual winter pleasure available all year round.

TEXT
ANKE VAN WIJCK

The rocky Asturian coastline

Powerful rolling waves burst against the rocky slopes of the Asturian coastline in the northwest of Spain. This is a sign that the bad weather front is not over yet. Even though the Atlantic has lost its fierceness and looks rather calm now, Javier Artemi, a professional diver from Gijón, warns that the undercurrents are still mighty strong. For ten days, the fishing fleet has been compelled to remain moored. Storm warnings have been renewed day after day. Perhaps this afternoon some of the larger boats will make it onto the open sea. But Javier dives for sea urchins and that puts patience even more to the test. Once calmer weather sets in, it will still take some two days for the waters to clear. And the weather map looks threatening again.

While plentiful along most of the Spanish coast, until not so long ago, in Spain sea urchins were appreciated only very locally. In Asturias and especially Gijón, Catalonia with an emphasis on the Palafrugell area, Denia in Alicante, and Cádiz in the southwest. But new generations of chefs are showing a steadily increasing interest in local and seasonal foods, as well as in unaltered flavors. So what better than this spiny creature to entice the ever more receptive and erudite palates of new and trained gourmands with its essence of sea? For whoever is willing to enjoy the experience–and not everybody is–this prickly ball arouses quite an array of sensations. "It is the crustacean that best synthesizes the sea," wrote the Galician author Julio Camba, known to regularly have eaten 15 to 20 dozen in one single sitting. "Savoring the sea urchin is unlike eating or drinking, it is like taking a breath on high seas," he claimed and left no doubt as to his predilection when he added that by comparison, even "the finest lobster tastes like tortoise and the best clams like old tires."

Sweet and Salty

The *paracentrotus lividus*, the species most prevalent in Spain, France and other Mediterranean countries, including Portugal and Morocco, is extremely delicate, in contrast with larger types of sea urchins that are consumed in other parts of the world, especially in Japan where there is true sea urchin frenzy. This gregarious animal lives in clusters in the cracks of rocks or in chalky soil where it settles in small hollows it digs out with its strong teeth. The *paracentrotus* comes in hues that no painter's palette could ever emulate: from almost black, through brown, deep moss-green, reddish and purple to a much more rare, mushroom white, the so-called albino. But the visual pleasure does not end here. Once opened up and lightly rinsed in seawater, its interior reveals a perfect pentacle of yellow to red pieces of roe. A waft of sea breeze tickles the nostrils heralding what is yet to come. Describing the taste is a serious challenge to even the most expert sea urchin enthusiast. Easily scooped up with a small spoon, the

sea urchins is restricted to the period between October 1st and April 30th. Landing volumes are limited to five kilos (11 lbs) per day for private harvesters and fifty for professionals, and no other fishing method is allowed but handpicking while standing or breath-hold diving. The moment of choice is at low tide when the surf temporarily recedes to unveil a wealth of pointed balls clustering together in the cracks of coastal rocks. The only tool is a knife or a special hook, and a net with an iron ring at the top to collect the sea urchins. In Galicia, professionals are permitted the use of a device called *narguilé*, a 30-40-meter hose connected to oxygen bottles that remain in the boat, to allow a better range of movement and to search at greater depth (to about 10 meters). A maximum of two divers and a shipper per boat are limited to 100 kilos (220 lbs) per day each (300 kilos/660 lbs total).

So when finally the weather gods let up for a brief period on that part of the country, at the few sea urchin canneries any other production process is halted. All hands on deck to receive as many sea urchins as can be landed! The operation has to be fast and efficient.

Oftentimes the reduced winter staff has to be beefed up on the spur of the moment, to attack piles of shiny sea urchins that are being delivered in bulk from Asturias and Galicia. On such days, divers work overtime in the icy Atlantic waters.

At the factory, one group of women is provided simply with a sort of bread knife to cut open the animals, and with one rubber glove to hold the sea urchin. (Spines in fact are only dangerous at impact when a

SOME SPINY QUESTIONS

There is no exception to the rule that every place with a tradition of eating sea urchins adamantly vindicates the supreme quality of the local variety over any others. "In my lifetime I have tasted sea urchins in many places, but none are as fine and taste of sea as ours" is a sentence so ubiquitous and universal that one only has to fill in the origin of whoever proclaims it. It comes as no surprise that this crustacean with its impenetrable outside and appealing inside is laden with an array of, oftentimes contradictory, popular beliefs. Here follow some fallacies that have been scientifically squared. Vernacular has it that the black sea urchin is empty (arbitrarily designated as male or female in different geographical areas) and is therefore not eaten in Spain. The fact is that it is another less abundant look-alike which lives in the same habitat, but has a different, rather thin and blackish, gonad structure, as opposed to the *paracentrotus lividus* that features larger gonads ranging from pale yellow to bright coral-red. Additionally, Manuel Ballesteros, zoologist at the University of Barcelona, makes it clear that, in contrast to what is often claimed, there is no scientific reason that supports any differences in taste between differently colored sea urchins (including the albino). Much like human hair, existing color differences are genetically conditioned. Neither can an external distinction be made between the sexes. It is not until they are opened up that the difference becomes apparent. "As in mussels," explains Jorge Luis Alcazar, a biologist at the Centro de Experimentación Pesquera (Center for Experimental Science in Fishery) in Gijón, "male gonads show a yellow to pale brown color, while female gonads are orange to red." And finally, despite the extended use of the term roe or caviar to describe the succulent edible parts of the sea urchin, in fact what is eaten are its gonads, the organ that both in males and females produces spermatozoids and eggs respectively.

broken off point easily gets lodged under the skin and may cause infection.) The second group only wields a small teaspoon to very carefully scoop out the roe from among the algae- and debris-filled entrails, loudly rejoicing each time they pick up a sea urchin with particularly full and prettily colored roe. Some even pride themselves that they are able to predict a particularly "handsome one," gauging it in their open hand. The scooped out roe, five per sea urchin, is placed in a sieve and, per portion of about 100 grams, is gently rinsed in salted water, and drained. Immediately, the roe is placed piece by piece in a can and, without any further additive, put on a conveyor belt, where the cans are sealed, washed in a steam bath and sterilized for about two hours at a temperature of 108-110°C (226-230°F). This allows for a shelf life of about four years. The little cans of 120 or 280 grams are then labeled and packaged, only to lie in waiting to be shipped for up to several months; another factor that puts sizeable pressure on this business. Not even the production of a very successful by-product, as is the smooth and rich sea urchin pâté, prepared with hake, milk, eggs and vegetal margarine, is able to offset the high costs involved. Sea urchins are bought cash on delivery. But there is this considerable gap between the period of capture and processing (October through April), and the time substantial orders start flowing in (prior to the Christmas season). This means that a small size company like Agromar with a total turnover of around two million euros, has about a third of that sum paralyzed with no return for four to six months. If one then learns, that to fill a small can of 120 grams, two dozen sea urchins are needed (an average of five percent of the total sea urchin weight) and that the whole production process is manual, one stops wondering why this industry is not more widespread and has remained fully in the realm of small family business.

On those same grounds the López sisters, who are the third generation to run Conservas Remo in nearby Candás, have kept their sea urchin operation small. Like others, they have greatly diversified their product line. Sandra, who is in charge of the commercial side of the business, finds that the growing popularity of the sea urchin is two-edged. "Wholesale prices have increased considerably and supply is even less dependable than before," she says, and attributes it to the rise of fresh sea urchin consumption. "We cannot raise our prices accordingly," Sandra regrets. A can of 120 grams now sells to the public for some twelve euros. Not too bad considering the possibilities. Think of that golden sea urchin omelette, or the special touch a sea urchin sauce lends to the fish of your choice.

A Source of Inspiration

"Sea urchins require a fish with personality," claims Quique Dacosta (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 54), one of a number of talented and hugely motivated young Spanish chefs, who have added this delicacy to their repertoires, as it epitomizes their philosophy. Use few but very fresh seasonal

ingredients and interfere as little as possible with their original flavor. At his restaurant El Poblet in Denia, Alicante, he is now offering an appetizer that includes sea urchin roe, local blood orange and herbs from the nearby Montgó mountains. "I now don't use the roe in sauces anymore," Dacosta says, "it has this beautiful sweet aftertaste and none of them tastes the same. That's their magic. I now only use them as they come." These could have been the words of Oriol Castro of Ferran Adrià's team at Taller de El Bulli (El Bulli's Workshop) in Barcelona. While strongly believing in the power of the original flavor, they experiment with textures. So, among other creations that feature sea urchin, they "designed" an appetizer where it is the absolute protagonist. Presented in a narrow martini glass, there is a bottom layer of clear gel made with the seawater that pours out of the sea urchin when it is opened up. Placed on top are some five or six pieces of fresh orange to coral-red sea urchin roe and it is capped off with a dot of sea urchin foam. The ocean in a glass!

At a few miles south from Cala Montjoi where Adrià has his famous restaurant, lies the area where this crustacean, while having been part of the local diet since times immemorial, in the last ten years has taken on a most particular role. "Sharing our tradition seemed like a good idea," says Quim Turró. Twelve years ago, when he was Palafrugell's tourism councillor, with the active participation of a group of hotel owners and restaurateurs from the area, he launched La Garoinada (the sea urchin fest). "We needed to bring life into the winter months," Turró explains. The area

with its beautiful coves and beaches is heavily visited by tourists in summer. Yet over the winter months most facilities would close. Not anymore. Since the campaign took off, the participating restaurants have experienced a continuously increasing affluence of patrons both over the weekends and through the week, and remain open year round. Other businesses like produce markets, stores, hotels, and even neighboring areas have benefited. Take Girbal, a centric pastry shop in Palafrugell. It features some scrumptious chocolate sea urchins, made of caramelized almond cuts bathed both in dark and milk chocolate.

In the picturesque seaside village of Llafranch, at just a few kilometers from Palafrugell, Quim Farrarons and Carles Bisbe, chef-owners of hotel-restaurant Llevant and Llafranch

WEB SITES

www.palafrugell.net/arees/turisme/gastronomia.html
The official Web site of the Palafrugell Town Council, with general information on the town and a special section on the Garoinada or Sea Urchin Festival. (Catalan, French, Spanish)

www.potom.com/poblet1.html
Web site giving the menu of the El Poblet restaurant in Denia. (English, Spanish, French, German)

www.elbulli.com
Carefully-designed El Bulli Web site includes information on the restaurant, its philosophy, location, catering services, hotels, press and the recently-created workshop. (Catalan, English, Spanish)

SPINE-FREE RECIPES

Text: *Joan Merlot*

The soft inner parts of sea urchins have been eaten on the coasts of Spain since time immemorial: freshly plucked from the sea with a few drops of lemon juice, as they enjoy them on the northern shore; or accompanied by scallions, bread spread with garlic mayonnaise and a Catalan blood sausage called *butifarra,* in the most authentic Catalan or Valencian style. Always washed down with a light, aromatic red wine, the choice that best suits this dish. And, if possible, consumed while facing the sea. In the town of Palafrugell, in Gerona, the natives still organize their *Garoinada*—a traditional culinary event where sea urchins are the centerpiece. But since contemporary Spanish cuisine adopted the prized reddish flesh of these marine creatures as a regular ingredient, it is less of a novelty. Some three decades ago, the Cantabrians and the Basques started turning out their sea urchin croquettes, sea urchins sautéed with beaten egg and fish served in sea urchin sauce. Frenchified bourgeois cuisine taught us to eat them with a teaspoon, served in their shells and invariably au gratin. And today's new imaginative cooking trends, brimming with technology, tend toward the preparation of oils, vinaigrette sauces and gelatins dotted with tiny iodized eggs.

Inspired by a winter dish from the Bajo Ampurdán, Joan Roca serves a rice-based recipe featuring black butifarra and sea urchins in his restaurant El Celler de Can Roca (in the provincial capital of Gerona). Another highly innovative Catalan chef, the brilliant Ferrán Adrià (of El Bulli restaurant in Roses, see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 43), made his sea urchins in boletus mushroom aspic with sprigs of fennel famous some ten years ago. Meanwhile, his predecessor in the kitchens of Cala Montjoi, Jean Louis Neichel, made his sea bass and Norway lobster tartar with sea urchins, oysters, caviar and algae a standard offering at the Barcelona restaurant that bears his surname. An hour's drive from Barcelona, in Sant Andreu de Llavaneres, chef Miguel Sánchez Romera offers his guests at L'Esguard a lobster sautéed with small sheets of fresh pasta and sea urchin.

Moving to Spain's northern Atlantic shores, the itinerary begins at the Zuberoa restaurant in Oyarzun, in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa, where Hilario Arbelaitz prepares oysters in aspic, which he combines with apple dumplings and sea urchins. Our next port of call is the Taberna de Viavélez (Viavélez Puerto, Asturias), where we can ask Paco Rom to serve us his renowned sea urchin goblet with cauliflower puree and *pimentón* oil. Our last stop near the northern coast is at Santiago de Compostela, in the Galician province of La Coruña. In her restaurant, Toñi Vicente offers the braver diner a surprising orange and sea urchin aspic. Looking further inland, Carmelo Bosque, at his Lillas Pastia in Huesca, Aragon, also deserves mention with his wedge of fresh tuna combined with an onion stuffed with truffles and sea urchin zabaliogne, as do the sea urchin goblet with clams in Spanish ham gelatin created by Pepe Rodríguez at El Bohío (Illescas, Toledo) or the broken eggs with sea urchins in cuttlefish sauce with a final dripping of basil-flavored olive oil invented by Andrés Madrigal at Madrid's Balzac. The fact is that these spiny mollusks do a tremendous amount of traveling.

respectively, are elated. The risk they took is paying off. Like the mentioned La Xicra, they are among the twelve restaurants that each year participate in La Garoinada, which goes from mid January to mid March when the sea urchin reportedly is at its best. As an appetizer, each restaurant serves a dozen fresh sea urchins on a wicker platter. For a main course and dessert, each chef prepares his own creation, always based however, on the traditional local cuisine, with the purpose of acquainting people with its numerous bounties. Prices range from 22 to 35 euros per menu. "Overall quality, even in places that do not officially participate, has gone up considerably. It is all working out," revels Turró.

So successful has been this campaign, that Cati Piera, who now occupies Turró's position as councillor for culture and tourism, commissioned a study to counteract protests by regional ecologists against the assumed depletion of the sea urchin population, allegedly furthered by the sea urchin fest. The Center for Advanced Studies in nearby Blanes concluded that only 1.1 percent of the existing resource was being captured, far from posing a danger. "I consider myself an ecologist," states Bisbe, "we commit ourselves to strictly adhere to the duration of the Garoinada campaign. We don't sell one sea urchin before or after those dates."

Carles Martínez and Marc Trias, two of the merely five licensed divers on the entire north Catalonian coast who daily breath-hold dive for sea urchins, have requested tougher regulations. They consider that the big problem lies in the uncontrolled action of furtive divers and tourists who tend to always scout the same places and snatch whatever size is at hand. "It is mere social alarm, there is no reason to worry," says Martínez. Unknowingly these divers have anticipated the conclusion of the above study, namely that "the best solution is small-scale management."

They know their business and people like Jaume Garrigó count on them. Eris-mar, the business he runs together with his wife, is the first and only in Spain to freeze sea urchin roe in small glass jars, a technique he learned from local chefs. Garrigó commits to shipping them to any point of destiny in Spain in less than twenty-four hours. This is not his only feat. He has succeeded in desiccating the spiny half shells to such perfection that their original color pattern remains almost unaltered. He ships them to most of his roe clients to adorn dishes or to hold a variety of sea urchin-based culinary creations.

Fresh, frozen, or preserved, on the shell or in a dish, raw or cooked, the sea urchin has secured itself a continuing presence on the ever more enticing Spanish gastronomic scenery, or as Miquel Marti, director of the Fishery Museum in Palamos accurately puts it, "it has gained social status." The excellencies of this small and still plentiful marine animal reportedly were extolled as early as the 6th century B.C., and it prompted Aristotle to an in-depth description of its wondrous structure in his *History of Animals* (the powerful mouth of the sea urchin is still called Aristotle's lantern). But today, more than ever, the sea urchin continues to be a fertile source of inspiration and, behind its inhospitable appearance, has turned out to have quite a personality. Why not make its acquaintance?

Anke van Wijck *is a sociologist and has a master's degree in gastronomy from Boston University. Her articles have appeared in the* Boston Globe.

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SAVING THE SOBRASSADA de Mallorca

TEXT
VICKY HAYWARD

Sobrassada is a deceptive looking sausage. In Mallorca, its homeland, it hangs in charcuterie shops, filling the air with the musky aroma of soft spiced raw pork cured inside natural, uneven sausage casings. Old fashioned and bulgy, these raw sausages have a rustic air. The ingredients are simple: chopped lean and fat pork, sea salt and finely ground sun-dried red pepper. But like so many traditional Mediterranean foods, sobrassada has proved hard to imitate. Any slight change in the quality of the ingredients imbalances the subtle chemistry which allows the meat to remain as soft as a *pâté*, but not sticky, as it cures in the moist island air, gathering flavor and aroma. Twenty years ago this craft-made Mallorcan sobrassada, eaten thinly spread on bread, had virtually disappeared from the market. Now it is making a comeback thanks to the island's pig rearers, cooks and sausage-makers. This is the story of how they saved sobrassada de Mallorca and how today, it is being rediscovered as a gourmet delicacy.

ANTONIO DE BENITO/ICEX

When Mallorca's first craft sausage maker, Pere Crespí, set up shop in 1864, his methods followed the traditions of the island's family pig-killings. It was a seasonal business. Native free-range black porkers were fattened on figs, pulses, carob and barley, and were slaughtered when the winter temperatures dropped enough to allow the safe handling of fresh meat. Teams of men would kill, bleed and butcher the pigs, then chop the pork finely. Hand-operated coarse mincing machines replaced chopping by hand at home. Women would wash the sausage casings made from the pig's intestines, turning them inside out and scrubbing them in brine scented with lemon and orange before cutting them into different lengths and shapes for stuffing. The sausages would then be strung up on lengths of bamboo and hung up to cure slowly in the cool, damp island air.

The Craft Industry

Not all parts of the pigs sold to the sausage-makers went to make sobrassada. The pigs' blood was used for *butifarrones*, or black puddings, and the fat was boiled down to make lard, or *saím*, which was used in all kinds of dishes from soups to *patisserie*. But sobrassada, made from pigs whose foraging diet was specially balanced to give the firm, creamy fat and sweet flesh needed for making it, was the main specialty. As sausage-making multiplied, so the island's pig herd grew and figs were planted to feed them. In 1807 Grasset de Saint Sauveur, a French diplomat, author of *Voyages dans les îles Baléares et Pithiuses*, counted 25,000 pigs on the island. Archduke Luis Salvador of Austria, who owned many estates on the island, depicts the landscapes of Majorca in his main work *Die Balearen in Wort und Bild geschildert*, written between 1869-1891. He estimated that by 1871, 66,539 pigs were killed annually, although most were still domestic animals destined for the family larder. The producers brought in the other ingredients: sea salt from the pans near the marshes and fine red pepper from mills which worked until recently in villages dotted around the Mallorcan plains: Marratxí, Sant Jordi, Llucmajor, Randa, Pòrtol and Santa María.

When sobrassada's fame spread, it was initially as a gourmet product. Mallorca's oldest surviving sausage-making workshop, Embotits Aguilò, built in 1900 in the port of Sòller, keeps its account books listing early shipments to Barcelona and Valencia, Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the late 19th century, cookbook writers from the Spanish mainland also began to discover sobrassada. Emilia Pardo Bazán, the Galician novelist, and Dionisio Pérèz, the pioneering Andalusian food writer, were among the first to sing its praises.

The Road to Extinction

How, then, did sobrassada come so close to disappearing? "By the 1970s the product carrying its name was so degraded that it was on the road to extinction," comments Mateu Castelló, president of the two denominations that now protect it. "Of course Mallorcan families kept making their own at home, but it never reached the shops."

One cause of sobrassada's downfall, like that of many good things, was its growing popularity. From the 1930s to the 1950s the Mallorcan craft industry flourished and quality

remained high. But from the fifties onwards the island's producers began to face ferocious competition from industrial charcuterie companies which produced a cheap, rough-and-ready approximation of sobrassada, selling it successfully wherever the genuine article was not known. This smooth-spreading, fat-rich, waxy paste bore little resemblance to the product whose name it carried. As one island proverb summed it up, *"qualque cosa és sobrassada"*–anything is sobrassada–an ironic comment used when somebody refuses to call something by its real name.

The Mallorcan producers fought back by adopting their rivals' strategies. Like them, they made cheaper versions of sobrassada for shipping to the mainland. They also began to import white porkers. A 1950s photo shows a crowd in Porreras village staring at a new phenomenon: the island's first giant pink pig. Quicker to fatten and more fertile than the Mallorcan Black porkers, breeds like the Duroc were crossed with native blacks to produce piebald Feixats, and then began to replace them.

At the same time, beach tourism swept the coasts and the island's agricultural economy retreated. Fig trees were felled to make way for hotels. International dishes replaced Mallorcan menus in restaurants. New hygiene laws made it almost impossible for sausage-makers to continue traditional on-the-spot slaughtering. The result of all these changes was a dramatic fall in the native herd. By 1980 only sixty-nine Mallorcan Black pigs (an autochthonous race not to be confounded with the black Iberian pig) survived.

The Return of the Black Pig

When I first visited Palma, Mallorca's capital, in 1988, I spent a morning browsing round the market. "Surprising produce," I wrote in my diary. "Dried tomatoes, sea fennel and rock fish. Sobrassada costs 620 pesetas a kilo. The woman at the stall said it can be softer or harder, eaten on bread or fried with eggs. Apparently it's hard to get hold of the right quality. Everyone bemoans its demise, as if it sums up the end of a way of life."

In fact, although I did not know it at the time, by then the corner had been turned. A group of Mallorcan cooks, shop owners and pig rearers had taken it into their own hands to save the sobrassada. The results would not show fully for several years, but the first signs were already there. A restaurant in Inca town, called C'an Amer, was winning critical acclaim for reviving old local dishes. One was fried sobrassada served with a honey sauce (see box) and another was wood-roast lamb spread with sobrassada, tomato and aubergines. Antonia Cantallops, C'an Amer's chef, made these dishes with homemade sobrassada.

Meanwhile, in Palma itself, a young businessman called Sebastián Simó Planés had opened a delicatessen, C'an Tia, dedicated to selling sobrassada. In his search for quality, he contacted four young farmers interested in rearing Mallorcan Blacks. Why were they prepared to take such an economic gamble?

"Put it down to romanticism," says Toni Fiol, one of those farmers, who started his herd with just ten black pigs in 1982.

Fiol and his friends had their work cut out tracing the breed's morphology from the few remaining animals. Lovably funny-faced animals with

PICKING YOUR SAUSAGE

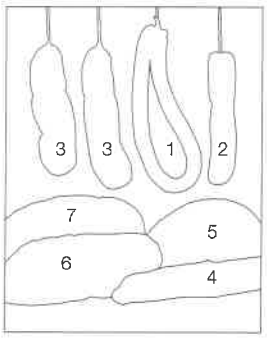
Sobrassada's shapes, sizes and names are based on the different types of sausage casing made from the intestine. Here are the main types in order of size, working from small to large.

1. *Longaniza or collar:* A necklace-shaped loop, this weighs 200-300 g (7-10 oz) and can be eaten after a few weeks curing. Very popular in Mallorca where it is fried or roasted. (Available only in Sobrassada de Mallorca PGI.)

2. *Semi-rizada:* The next size up is a salami-like sausage weighing around 400 g (13 oz), which may be tied around the middle with a string. Cured for at least a month.

3. *Rizada:* The classic sobrassada, tied up like a bulgy packet with string, cured for six to twelve weeks. Made from skins taken between the small and large intestine, it generally weighs in at around 850 g (1 3/4 lb).

4. *Culana:* Shaped like a big baseball bat, this may be as long as an arm, and weigh 2.5-3 kilos (5-15 lb). It



needs at least two months curing; aficionados prefer 4-5 months.
5. *Bufeta:* Balloon shaped, made from the pig's bladder, with criss-cross strings helping it to keep in shape, this weighs about 1-1 1/2 kilos (2-3 lb) and is cured for at least three months.
6. *Poltrú or ciego:* A 2-4 kilo (4-8 lb) sausage wrapped like a meat roast with a triple crossways string, this is the stuffed large end of the intestine, and is cured for anything from three to six months.
7. *Bisbe:* A large sausage shaped a bit like a lumpy cushion, nick-named "the bishop" and stuffed into the pig's stomach, it weighs 4 to 30 kilos (8-60 lb), but averages 8-9 kilos (16-18 lb). Usually bought by restaurants and bars.

large floppy ears and fatty protuberances dangling under their double chins, they were a hairy breed that had evolved from the various pigs brought to the island in classical times. In the early 1980s, after talking to older people and identifying the best specimens, Fiol and his friends began breeding. Producers like C'an Tia helped finance the costs by paying the rearers in advance. Standards were agreed upon and deals were struck during lunch or dinner.
"They were treated a bit like madmen, but their enthusiasm was infectious," remembers sobrassada maker Juan Sureda Llinás, who had set up business in 1951 and, via a chance contact, made C'an Tia's black-pig sobrassada for them.
The gamble they took paid off. Both local and visiting gourmets snapped up the new top-quality sobrassada, even though it was two to three times more expensive than the standard product. As a result, the island's black pig herd grew and the rearers formed themselves into an association, the Ramaders de Porc Negre Mallorquí Selecte. By 1997, there were over thirty rearers and nearly four hundred black pigs in breeding stock on the island.

The Sobrassada Makers

In the late 1980s the sausage-makers made their first moves to protect their product.
"Some of us became convinced that our survival depended on quality instead of competing with price," says Juan Sureda Llinás. "But we had to be practical about the market. It was slow work, step by step."
Following regional and national registration, two sobrassada denominations were set up in 1994. One of these protects sausages made locally from the meat of white pigs. It has three ingredients: pork, salt from the island's pans and sun-dried *pimentón* from Murcia. The ingredients may be imported, but the sausages must be cured in the island's damp, salty air. Lean pork must make up 30-60 percent of the product, and fatback the other 40-70 percent. Known as Sobrassada de Mallorca, this type has been defined by a European PGI since 1996 (see Glossary page 127).
The second denomination protects the sobrassada revived by enthusiasts in the early 1980s. Known as Sobrassada de Mallorca de Cerdo Negro, it is made from the meat of

free-range Mallorcan Blacks which stay with their mothers until fully weaned, and are reared in open fields or woodland for nine months. In the final three month period which follows they may be stabled and fattened on figs, pulses and barley. Some growers, such as Toni Fiol, grow their own feed too. Identifying ear tags track each pig from birth to slaughter. The sausages made from these pigs, cured for at least three months in natural casings, come wrapped in an identifying shiny black wrapper, and have been registered since 1996 as a European Denomination of Origin.
The denomination also set in place quality controls and checks for both types of sobrassada. Sausage meat samples taken randomly from registered producers throughout the year are analyzed for their meat, fat and water content. Alongside this, each producer's sobrassada has to go anonymously before a producers' tasting jury which has the right to refuse a sausage labeling as denomination sobrassada. It has been known to happen. One producer changed his supplier of fatback and the sausages came out too buttery. Another somehow ended up with garlicky sobrassada. It is not unknown, either, for producers to criticize their own sausage–but only discover that afterwards.

WEB SITES

www.mallorca-market.com/deutsch/restaurar/c-amer
A simple Web site for the Can Amer restaurant. (German)

The Modern Craft

"These days the real art is keeping the machinery clean," says Bartolomé Frau I Oliver, who now owns Embotits Aguilo. He produces 85 tons of sobrassada a year.
Frau makes it sound deceptively simple. It is true that steel machines now chop and blend 200-kilo batches of sausage meat at a time. Then it is left for a day for the flavors to blend before being stuffed into the casings. But there is also the curing process. "That is an art too, I suppose," Frau admits. The technique is quite different from ham curing. Temperatures must be held stable, rather than rising with the spring and summer heat. If dryness closes the pores of the casing, the meat does not cure. Wetness leaves sobrassada smelling of its casing. During the curing process, which may last from one to eight months, depending on the size and shape of the sausage (see box), it loses 15-20 percent of its weight in water, which evaporates out into the humid, saline, peppery, tangy air and acquires a fine, powdery white flora on the skin, which is brushed off for final packing.
"The flora gives a bouquet," says Frau. "I'm not a biologist, but I know it's a part of perfect curing." Another craft element is the recipe itself, which varies, especially with the mix of the sweet or spicy pimentón that makes up four to seven percent of the sausage's total weight. "The pepper's flavoring and coloring power are a vital element of quality," comments Juan Sureda Llinas.
Today he makes 180 tons of sobrassada, with a variety of qualities. They include two 60 percent meat sausages, one made purely from black pork and the other from a mix of black and white pork. He has also kept making most of the rustic shapes and sizes that grew up to make use of every part of the pig's twenty meters of intestine. Other traditions also remain unchanged. It is still the women who do the deft hand-work today, folding over the ends by hand and tying the larger sausages with string. They judge the tightness with miraculously fast instinct and eye.

Where to Next?

Today sobrassada's survival is guaranteed. Thirty-eight producers annually make and sell 2,500 tons of Sobrassada de Mallorca from the meat of white porkers. Remarkably, too, the top-quality D.O. sobrassada made from native black pigs is making a spectacular comeback. Less than twenty years after the black pigs nearly died out, a total of 96 rearers send three thousand Black Mallorcan pigs for slaughter annually. With production rising at 10-15 percent every year, annual production has now reached over 150 tons. Apart from that, 20 percent of the native herd is bought for family pig-killings.

THE SOBRASSADA STORY

Like so many Mediterranean foods, sobrassada is a product of local necessity and cosmopolitan influences. Mallorca's damp sea air made it impossible to cure hams, so in the 15th century the island's wealthy families learned the technique for making a finely cut, spiced, long-keeping sausage called *sopresatte,* which found its way from Italy around the ports of the Catalan-Aragonese empire, traveling by ship. It was another century, however, before sun-dried paprika, called *pimentón,* the finely ground silky powder made from the red peppers Columbus brought back from the New World, made its way to Mallorca. Pimentón turned sobrassada from a white to a rusty red sausage, which, thanks to pimentón's anti-oxidant properties, could keep for up to a year if carefully cured in a cool place. It also turned it from a luxury to a staple product and then it became so much a part of everyday life, spread on the locally made country bread, that an anonymous Mallorcan cookery author, writing in 1931, said there was no need to give a recipe for it since everyone knew how to make sobrassada. (Of course, this may have been a way of keeping her family recipe secret.) Today many Mallorcan families still make their own sobrassada, keeping alive the local variations. Sa Pobla village is famous for its spicy version. Food writer Caty Juan's family makes the old white sobrassada spiced only with black pepper. The Ibizan equivalent is a coarser-cut and dryer sausage, and Menorcan is smoother and finer cut. Wherever Mallorcans have settled they have also taken their sausage-making with them. The Alicante version, known as sobrasada de la Marina, is now registered as a traditional regional speciality in its own right.

There is an encouraging logic to the pattern. Statistics in Catalonia, the largest market outside Mallorca, suggest buyers go through a self-educating curve, moving steadily from the cheapest sobrassada packed in tubs, then discovering the mildest versions of the genuine article, in sausage skins, and finally reaching the mature, meaty, black-pig sobrassadas preferred on home ground. In other words, people know a good thing when they get a chance to try it, and they are prepared to pay for it too. "It may be twice the price," says Juan Sureda Llinás, "but it's three times the quality."

These statistics open up the possibility of further raising the quality of the product. One option is the revival of local pimentón-making. Studies of the local, highly aromatic pepper variety, called *banya de cabra,* would be needed to ensure that it can deliver consistent coloring, preserving and flavoring power. Another option is the relaunch of the island's white pig herd to replace the intensively reared pigs currently bought in from Catalonia to make the Sobrassada de Mallorca. The denominations' regulatory council takes a long-term view, hoping that both might be possible over the next ten years. This year, for the first time, organic black pig sobrassada will also be made.

"At first, it was a new world for the small family companies," comments Antonia María Torres, the denominations' technical director and manager since 1994. "It was a huge change to learn about the legislation, the labeling and so on. But now they've got on top of that, they want to learn and do more."

The final open question is whether the taste for sobrassada could take

off abroad. Visitors to the island who have a chance to eat the real thing seem to acquire a taste for it. "I loved the delicate, sweetish, peppery red sobrassada spread on brown peasant bread," wrote William Graves in his book *Wild Olives*.

That is only half of its potential. "I compare it to the shiitake mushroom in cooking," says Antoni Pinya I Florit, who has taught cooking in Mallorca for 25 years at the university's faculty for tourist studies, and is working on a program to revive its traditional uses. "Mallorcan women have always used it like a concentrate, in very small quantities, in soups, stews, stocks, stuffings for meat and seafood, and bean dishes." He cites sobrassada *coca*–a kind of Mediterranean Spanish pizza–and *calamares* stuffed with it as popular dishes due for a revival.

Again, the first signs suggest that things are looking good. Five producers are already exporting via gourmet distributors in Europe. At the same time sobrassada is beginning to appear on all kinds of island menus, both new and traditional. Antonia Cantallops' son, Juan Torrens, cooks it with polenta, bakes it rolled up in bread dough, and serves sobrassada and honey sauce with roast salted cod. Koldo Royo, the Basque chef, uses it in croquettes and *millefeuilles*. At the Plat d'Or, it is mixed with dried figs and apricots to stuff boned lamb.

The next generation of chefs also seem convinced by its potential. "There is a new generation of people who no longer want to sell a disguised Mallorca," says Guillermo Méndez, aged 33, head chef at El Olivo, the restaurant of Deyà hotel La Residencia.

The dishes there include a sobrassada risotto made with local rice, a brochette of prawns with black-pig fatback and sobrassada, and even a first course of foie gras with sobrassada sauce. Now that, for an old-fashioned, rustic sausage, is sophisticated company, suggesting this may not be the end of the sobrassada story. The next episode, that of a 21st-century gourmet product, has only just begun.

***Vicky Hayward** is a writer, journalist and book editor whose articles about the arts, travel, social issues and food are published internationally. She is senior editor of Booth-Clibborn Editions, London. She lives in Madrid.*

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SOBRASSADA AND HONEY

If you ask most Mallorcan gourmets how they like their sobrassada, they will tell you that they eat it the old-fashioned way, simply spread on local *pan payes*, the unsalted light wholemeal bread. But there are plenty of other traditional ideas. The most famous dish, sobrassada with honey, first written down by 18th-century Augustinian friar Jaume Martí, is from Fellanitx. Later, the Archduke Luis Salvador of Austria claimed that most of the island's honey ended up on this dish. He was probably exaggerating but nonetheless it gives an idea of the dish's popularity. Here is Jaume Martí's recipe. "You will put... sobresada [sic] on the embers...When cooked you will peel it and break it into small bits; you will put honey in a small pan, and with it a little broth, or if not hot water, and you will take it to the table. Others like it with a little vinegar; many boil it and it is not so good. Others make slices of it and it is not as good, because the honey does not penetrate it." This is excellent made as a sauce for game, boiled ham or roast

pork. You can make it using 100 g (3.5 oz) sobrassada, either grilled or roasted, one dessert spoon of honey, 120 ml (4 fl oz) of light chicken or vegetable broth, and one dessert spoon of balsamic wine vinegar.

RECIPES

11

Food Editor
María Jesús Gil de Antuñano
Photos recipes
Rosa Muñoz/ICEX
Translation
Jenny McDonald

Canapés of Caramelized Sobrassada

Serves 12:
48 round slices of Melba toast
250 g (9 oz) black pig sobrassada
60 g (2 oz) sugar

Refrigerate the *sobrassada* for half an hour to make it firm, then slice thinly. Cut the slices into circles the size of the Melba toast using a pastry cutter, and place each circle on a piece of toast. Cover with sugar, heat a metal spatula until red hot and place briefly on the sugar surface to caramelize it. Serve immediately.

Recommended wine:
A young red D.O. Valdepeñas made from Tempranillo grapes. The color is an attractive burgundy with purple tinges and the intense aroma is reminiscent of red berries and herbs. Dry, fresh, full and flavorsome in the mouth, with a long, fruity finish.

Lamb with Eggplant and Sobrassada

Recipe from the Can Amer Restaurant

Serves 4:
2 shoulders of baby lamb, weighing approx. 750 g (1 1/2 lb)
4 large, fresh eggplants
250 g (9 oz) lean sobrassada
1 leek, white part only
1 medium-sized onion
2 carrots
2 heads garlic
1 bundle herbs
0.5 l (17 fl oz) meat stock
1 glass *rancio* wine

Carefully bone the shoulders of lamb, spreading out the meat evenly. Season with salt and pepper. Chop the leek, onion, carrots and garlic. Peel the eggplant and slice finely. Lightly fry in deep olive oil. Remove before they turn brown and drain on paper towels. Cover the meat with the eggplant slices and place strips of sobrassada from one end to the other. Roll up the meat, tie or sew up and brown together with the bones in a little of the oil used to fry the eggplants. Add the chopped vegetables and herbs, pour over half the stock and the wine and roast in the oven for about 50 minutes, turning occasionally and gradually adding the rest of the stock and wine. Slice and serve with its sauce. Garnish with caramelized pears stewed in white wine.

Recommended wine:
A red crianza made of 50 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 50 percent Merlot from the D.O. Pla i Llevant. A wine with an intense, complex aroma of stewed fruit and touches of herbs, spice, wood, toast and smoke. It makes a fresh and full partner for this dish, leaving behind a pleasant, balanced aftertaste.

Potato Cubes with Sobrassada

Serves 4:

8 even-sized and shaped large potatoes
8 egg yolks
250 g (9 oz) black pig sobrassada
Salt
Oil for deep frying

Peel the potatoes then wash and cut into even-sized cube shapes (or use a pastry cutter to make cylinder shapes, in which case the recipe is called "potato cylinders…"). Cut off a 0.5 cm slice from the top, then empty out and cook in boiling salted water for 15 minutes. Drain. Place a pinch of sobrassada and an egg yolk inside each cube, season with salt then cover with the tops, sticking them down with a little egg yolk. Deep fry in hot oil until golden but remove before the egg yolks set. Drain on paper towels. Slice a small sobrassada and heat the slices briskly in an iron frying pan or on a griddle, turning once. Place the stuffed potato cubes on the sobrassada slices and serve while still very hot.

Recommended wine:

A young Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot D.O. Somontano rosé, with an attractive raspberry color and aromas of flowers, fruit and herbs. A pleasant, fresh and lively wine with a good balance and a long aftertaste.

Pasta with Garlic and Sobrassada

Serves 4:

300 g (10 1/2 oz) egg-flavored pasta (tagliatelle, spaghetti, fusilli)
100 g (3 1/2 oz) sobrassada
1 dl (6 tablespoons/4 fl oz)olive oil
2 cloves garlic
Half of a chili pepper
Salt

Heat the oil in a large frying pan and fry the peeled and thinly-sliced garlic until golden. Add the chili in rings and the sobrassada in pieces and stir over the heat until the sobrassada breaks up. Cook the pasta in boiling salted water following the instructions on the packet. Drain then lightly stir into the flavored oil. Serve immediately.

Recommended wine:

A young 2000 red D.O. Valdepeñas, made from Tempranillo. With an intense aroma of berries and herbs. A dry, fresh, full and flavorsome wine with a long, characteristic aftertaste.

Monkfish with Sea Urchin Sauce

Serves 4:

8 monkfish medallions
500 ml (17 fl oz) fish stock
8 sea urchins or 1 can sea urchin roe
40 g (1 1/2 oz) flour
0.5 dl (3 tbs/2 fl oz)oil
1/2 clove garlic, finely chopped
Salt and pepper

Wash the fish, then drain and season with salt and pepper. Add a little oil to an iron frying pan and lightly fry the medallions on both sides until golden. Remove and reserve the pan juices. Heat the remaining oil in the same frying pan and fry the chopped garlic. Add the flour and fry until just beginning to turn brown. Pour in the fish stock, season and stir over a gentle heat for a few minutes until the sauce has thickened. Set aside a little of the roe, adding the rest to the sauce, together with the monkfish juices. Check the seasoning then add the monkfish medallions. Bring to a boil then serve. Sprinkle the sauce with the remaining roe and accompany with steamed potatoes.

Recommended wine:

A white, barrel-fermented D.O. Penedés made from Sauvignon and Parellada grapes offers an intense aroma of fresh, green hay and citrus fruits contributed by the Sauvignon. This will become more intense on the palate, with a fresh, flavorsome finish.

Pastry Flower with Vegetables and Sea Urchin Sauce

Pasta Nest with Sea Urchin Sauce

Serves 4:

400 g (14 oz) semi-fresh egg Tagliatelle, flavored with tomato or spinach
A splash of oil
Salt

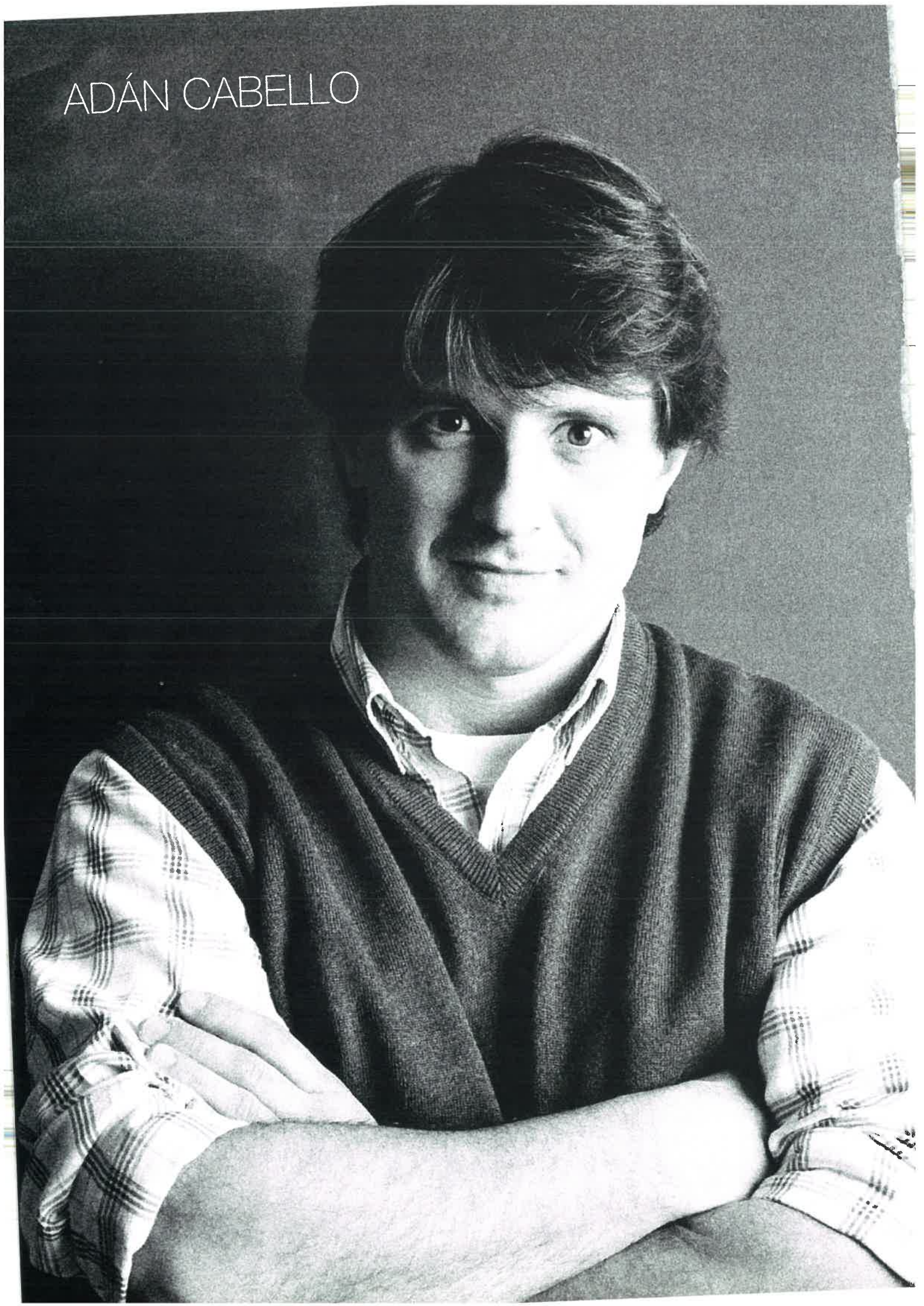
Sea urchin sauce:

1/2 onion
1 leek
1 carrot
1 clove garlic
8 sea urchins or 1 can sea urchin roe
240 ml (8 fl oz) fish stock
0.5 dl (3 tbs/2 fl oz) oil
Salt

Empty the sea urchins, keeping the roe. Finely chop the leek, onion, carrot and garlic and fry in the oil until golden. Add the stock and the fresh or canned roe, season and cook until the stock has reduced a little. Cook the pasta *al dente* in plenty of boiling salted water with a splash of oil for the time indicated on the packet. Drain and serve, forming a nest shape. (Wrap around a fork then lift the fork out upwards.) Fill the center of the nest with the sea urchin sauce.

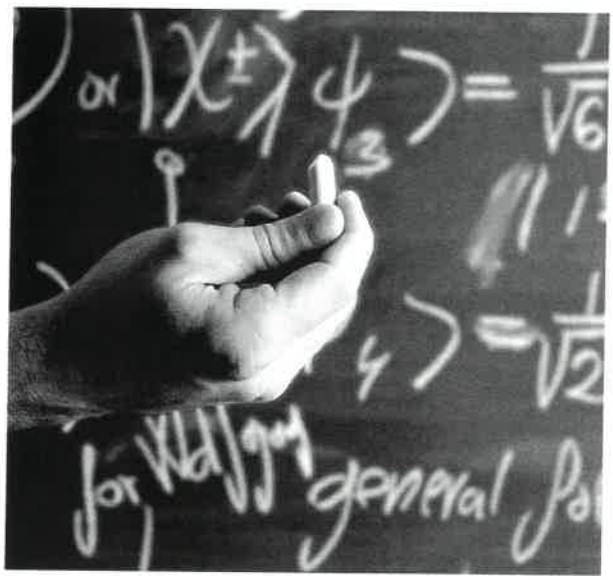
Recommended wine:

The ruby red of a young, dry rosé wine from the D.O. Cigales, made from a blend of Tempranillo, Albillo and Verdejo, will not only be attractive to the eye but the complex aroma and flavor will complement the subtle flavors of this pasta dish.


ADÁN CABELLO

21st-Century Quixotes. Part 3

In Pursuit of Intellectual BEAUTY



In this issue, we meet Adán Cabello Quintero, professor of applied physics at the University of Seville, and one of the few Spaniards involved in research into the principles of quantum mechanics. "Quantum physics, quantum mechanics and quantum theory are three terms used interchangeably to mean one and the same thing: the most satisfactory description of nature we have at our disposal."

classes and seeing a group of students interested in what I'm explaining to them, but what I really enjoy is research." For a theoretical physicist, research does not consist in working in a laboratory full of strange apparatus: "At night, I take advantage of the silence and solitude to shut myself in my room and spend three hours or so thinking." About what? "I start asking myself questions and trying to answer them by means of mathematical calculations." Using this method, so simple and yet so complex, Adán has reached conclusions which have surprised the scientific community. His researches corroborate the demonstration that "hidden variables" do not exist in nature as Albert Einstein erroneously believed. Einstein, possessor of one of the greatest minds mankind has ever known, never understood quantum physics, which he considered incomplete, contrary to the beliefs of Bohr and the Copenhagen School, representative of the orthodox stream. Two divergent ways of understanding nature, whose balance Adán Cabello has contributed to tipping in favor of the orthodox by means of his simplification of the Kochen-Specker Theorem, which deploys 117 physical magnitudes to refute Einstein's premise, and which Cabello reduces to 18 magnitudes and nine equations.

And of what practical use is that? "None, really, but it contributes something new to our way of understanding nature." Cabello experiences science in its purest state, and the experimental applications of physics are of little interest to him:

"Unfortunately, a theoretical physicist is not much concerned with the use or industrial applications of a discovery–what he's pursuing is intellectual beauty. What I like about theory is that, unlike an experimental physicist, I don't have to depend on someone else's work to carry out my own. And I don't need a lot of resources or costly equipment to do it."

It is a fact that the history of physics is full of great works achieved by people using only a pencil and paper and mind power. So little, yet so much: "Throughout its short history, quantum physics has demonstrated that many of the conclusions reached by a theoretical researcher cannot be put into immediate practice, either for lack of resources or because the appropriate technology does not yet exist. But years later, when it becomes possible to do so, the experiment is carried out and it is found that, yes, those purely theoretical predictions materialize into something real." This is what happened with the laser, for example, and what will happen with quantum computers. Experiments are still at the early stage, but within forty or fifty years, when we have the technology necessary to isolate the 10,000 atoms needed to create the "brain" of a quantum computer, the prediction made on a piece of paper by a theoretical physicist alone in his study one day will become reality. Currently, the experimental challenges being tackled by quantum physics are centered on cryptography, computation and teletransport. The first of these will make it possible to increase the security of, for example, electronic mail. Quantum computers will be infinitely faster than present-day ones. Teletransport, meanwhile, is still very much in its infancy. Basically, what it does is to create a replica of an object (or at least the appearance of the object) at a distance. The most spectacular experiment so far was carried out last year at Denmark's Aarhus University: "where an interlaced state of trillions of atoms was achieved. This would be the first step for teletransporting quantum states of trillions of atoms, but I find it hard to believe that we'll see objects any bigger than molecules being teletransported during my lifetime."

Cabello explains that, at a theoretical level: "one of the aims of modern physics is to obtain a quantum theory of gravity or, better still, a TOE (Theory of Everything) or unified theory, which would explain not only nuclear and electromagnetic interactions but also gravity and, by the by, why the values of nature's constants are what they are." But Adán Cabello's researches are not in that area. "For the moment, that's a highly speculative field. Recently, my interest has been focused on finding new applications for interlaced states. This is something that could find practical application in the future in improving communications systems."

Thinking. That is what Adán Cabello's job is, really, and what he passionately loves doing. "I'm looking forward to September, when I'm off to Montreal for a sort of 'quantum commune' where we'll spend three weeks debating and discussing problems of quantum physics." And what results will they achieve? We can't predict that–this isn't classical physics, remember. But in fifty or a hundred years, people may be using objects that make their lives easier, and whose functional principles already exist today in the minds of quantum theorists.

Carlos Tejero is a journalist and has worked at ICEX since 1985.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Text
Vicky Hayward

Pedro Subijana, one of the most admired figures in Basque cooking, explains at the beginning of his new book that he is happy to be a long-distance runner rather than a sprinter. It is a modest way of explaining why he has taken so long to write his first book, which comes 20 years after he first won two Michelin stars at Alkalarre, his stunning cliff-top restaurant outside San Sebastián. The result, **La cocina de Akelarre–el sueño de Pedro Subijana** (Akelarre's Cooking–Pedro Subijana's Dream), is personal and lavish, and it doubles as a splendid look back over thirty years of Basque cooking. Coincidentally, another great Basque cook, Martín Berasategui, published his first book last autumn, just as he picked up a third Michelin star. It is an elegy to tradition, as you might guess from the title–**Calendario de nuestra cocina tradicional** (Calendar of Our Traditional Cookery)–but it is also a measured approach to evolving modern versions of old dishes. For full reviews of both books. (See box on next page).

La cocina extravagante o el arte de no saber comer (Extravagant Cuisine or the Art of Not Knowing How to Eat) by José Manuel Vilabella is a different kettle of fish. This is one of the best-written food-books of 2001 although I'm not sure that Vilabella knows how to cook at all. He takes a sardonic look at Spanish food through eighty fast-moving, amusing articles that poke affectionate fun at national eating habits. Vilabella's writing style flows along as smoothly as a glass of good Rioja, making the serious critique behind it easy to digest. He is refreshingly honest on themes like Spain's slowness to recognize the value of its own olive oil. Essential reading if you want to go behind the stereotypes of Spanish food. (*Alianza Editorial, www.alianzaeditorial.es*)

In Brief

HOME COOKING

Cien recetas con caracoles (A Hundred Recipes Using Snails) Josep M Morell I Bitrià's book assumes you can collect or buy six popular types of Catalan snail. It's hardly a relevant point though. This book, a prizewinner at the 1999 Salón Internacional del Libro de Cocina de Versailles, is eccentrically endearing. We learn that snails move around at five meters an hour, but only a meter an hour on sand, for example. The recipes make for good reading, too, but the introduction made me so fond of snails that I no longer want to eat them. (*Editorial Milenio, em.milenio.com*)

Cocina 100% microondas (100% Microwave Cooking) María Jesús Gil de Antuñano, food writer for *El País* magazine and *Spain Gourmetour*, gives useful microwave shortcuts to use in Spanish cooking–for example, how to soak pulses, how to toast almonds and how to make slow-cooked stews–as well as a mass of general practical information. (*El Pais Aguilar, www.elpais-aguilar.es*)

Cocina silvestre (Cooking from the Wild) If you are a survivalist or hunter, then this is the book for you. The subtitle "Gastronomy of Food Sports" is a fair one judging from Francesc Xavier Marimon's recipes for river fish, sea fish, funghi and wood fruits–as well as poppies, lizards and acorns. This is good cooking. But the problem, of course, is getting your ingredients. An appendix on how to catch a lizard would be useful. (*Editorial Milenio, em.milenio.com*)

Comer bien sin rascarse el bolsillo (How to Eat Well Without Emptying Your Pockets) What happens when two male Catalan gastronomers write an everyday cookbook? Miquel Sen's and Joan Vinyol's recipes combine simple comfort with epicurean adventures. Aubergine croquettes, onion and pear soup, and skate with saffron are a few examples. Each one is simply written up, with a rating for speed and difficulty. A good book from which to start exploring real-life Mediterranean cooking. (*Editorial Planeta, www.editorial.planeta.es*)

El festín de las letras (The Feast of Writing) In 1990 El Chiscón, a small restaurant in Madrid, held a short-story competition called "Cooking and Color." Since then the competition has been held annually over a series of dinners, each time with a different theme. This book is a memoir of the best stories and the restaurant's own cooking, a mix of modern and traditional, served during the competitions. (*Editorial Nuevas Estructuras, nuevases@fedecali.es*)

La cocina del bacalao (Salt-cod Cuisine) Alberto Cogul, chef and salt-cod enthusiast from Lérida, explores recipes from around Iberia, but emphasizes the two regional cuisines that have raised salt-cod cooking to a fine art: Basque and Catalan. This is an accessible small book at its best when the author is on home territory–and there is good background on desalinating, marinating and smoking salt-cod. (*Editorial Milenio, em.milenio.com*)

Los sabores perdidos (The Lost Flavors) A spirited celebration of old-fashioned Spanish cooking by sociologist, broadcaster and food writer Lorenzo Díaz. He has picked recipes from friends,

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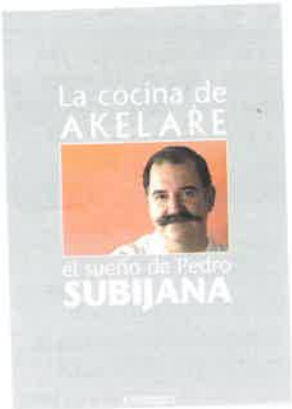
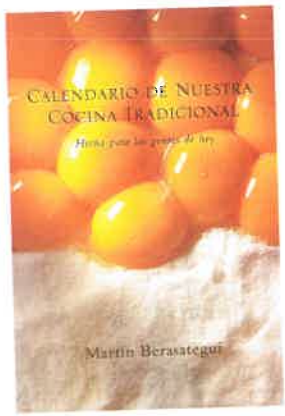
writers and chefs that sum up a disappearing world, and he prefaces each with chatty thoughts on the subject. I would not be as pessimistic as him about the future of these dishes, but he makes some good points–for example, that there are many Mediterranean diets, not just one. (*Editorial Edaf, S.A., www.edaf.net*)

RESTAURANT COOKING

Cocina y monasterios en La Rioja–El vino y los 5 sentidos (Cooking and Monasteries in the Rioja–Wine and the Five Senses) The first half of this beautiful book, produced by the Riojan government to promote the region's vineyard and winemaking culture, is a historical essay about the re-





Subijana and Berasategui

Pedro Subijana and Martín Berasategui, two of San Sebastián's top chefs, have published major books in the last few months. At first glance they are quite different. Berasategui's book, entitled **Calendario de nuestra cocina tradicional** (Calendar of Our Traditional Cooking), is seasonal and emphasizes traditional dishes for home cooking. Subijana's book, entitled **La cocina de Akelarre**, is a chef's autobiography collecting together recipes accumulated during a brilliant career. But both books are celebrations of Basque cuisine as a whole, showing how it draws its vitality from the links between home and restaurant cooking, and between traditional values and creative modernity. "A tree must produce new shoots and leaves," says Berasategui. "In the same way, tradition must grow all the time." Thus, in his first chapter, dealing with spring, we find a section on sheep's milk which includes recipes for old-fashioned *mamia* (junket) as well as Martín's own new recipes for mamia mousse and honey ice cream. One sees, then, how the repertoire grows. Subijana also shows this, but by looking back over a lifetime of cooking. "I'm a nonconformist, a perfectionist and an idealist," he explains. "As I see it, there are always more rules to break." He deals first with the traditional cuisine of his youth; then with the Basque nouvelle cuisine born in the late 1970s; and, finally, with his cooking today. This particularly impressive section includes nearly fifty bold, playful dishes such as veal with licorice, langoustines with seaweed and quinoa, and Pedro's famous iced gin & tonic dessert. Both books use wonderful photography to reflect the cooking's careful aesthetics and, most important of all, they both have a wonderful sense of humanity. "In the end," says Subijana, "I realize I really like cooking to make people happy".

FOODIE'S CORNER

Conferences, fairs, new restaurants, awards, star chefs–the food world is buzzing just about everywhere, Spain included. This section aims to reflect what's going on within Spain itself and events relevant to Spain elsewhere in the world.

Fairs

The 4th **World Gastronomy and Wine Congress** is to be held in Seville from 18 to 22 September 2002 under the title "Gastronomy as a Driving Force for Tourism and Agrifood Trade." In January 2000, the *Conseil Mondial de la Gastronomie* (World Gastronomy Council) based in Paris unanimously gave the go-ahead to the *Academia Andaluza de Gastronomía* (Andalusian Academy of Gastronomy) for the organization of its 2002 Congress. This Academy was set up in 1988 to promote culinary skill, especially through research and dissemination, giving it the importance it deserves. Six thousand participants are expected at the event which has a very full program, addressing the subjects of gastronomy and health, genetically modified crops, gastronomy and tourism, gastronomy and culture, and wines of the world, amongst others. For further information: www.gastrovinos.com

The **World Wine Fair,** which is now becoming consolidated amongst wine circles, held its third edition in Madrid from 30 January to 2 February. A new initiative this year was the "five-star marriage" which featured some of the great Spanish chefs–Juan Mari Arzak (San Sebastián), Ferrán Adrià (Gerona), Abraham García and Salvador Gallego (Madrid), Martín Berasategui (San Sebastián) alongside top-ranking sommeliers Custodio Zamarra and Kasia Romanska

Text
Luis Serra
Translation
Jenny McDonald

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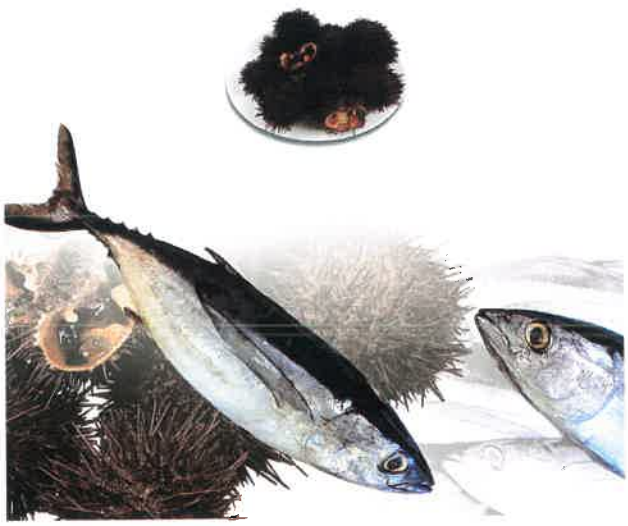

(Madrid). The marriages they achieved between wines and dishes they produced there and then delighted the audience. An exclusive booklet gives the five recipes and the characteristics of the selected wines.
For further information: www.salondelvino.com

On 10 and 11 January, the Foundation for Wine and Nutrition Research (FIVIN) and the Foundation for the Protection of Vineyards, the Environment and Consumers (VIMAC) held a forum in Barcelona entitled **Wine in the 21st Century.** It focused on priorities in the wine-growing sector, with a view to promoting the development and taking in account quality, the beneficial effects of wine on health, respect for the environment, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and consumer access to information.
One of the new initiatives in the forum this year was the award by the FIVIN of its first gold medal in recognition of the work being done by the cardiologist, Valentín Fuster, director of the ZENA Cardiovascular Institute, and Michael A. Wiener, from Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

The Grupo Gourmets held the 16th edition of its **Club de Gourmet International Fair** in Madrid from 22 to 25 April, an opportunity to display and promote the best of Spanish and international food products. The previous edition received 831 exhibitors and 42,395 professional visitors.
The 3rd Workshop on Gourmet Senses took place in parallel to the Fair. The aim of these workshops is to teach consumers about the world of food and this year's edition focused on children and young people.
The 7th Spanish Cooks Championship (organized by the Spanish Association of Young Restaurateurs) also took place during the Fair. Its winner will represent Spain in the Bocuse d'Or worldwide championship in January 2003. Other parallel activities were New Products 2002, the awards ceremony, and the Gourmetoliva Forum which included extra virgin olive oil tasting sessions.
For further information: www.gourmets.net

The 14th edition of **Alimentaria**, the international food and drinks fair, held in Barcelona from 4 to 8 March, received over 4,000 companies from one hundred countries. This year the fair was divided into 11 product areas. Amongst the most important activities were the 4th International Food Forum, Innoval, the 2nd Business Cooperation Meeting and the 4th Congress on the Mediterranean Diet, now more a cultural concept than a fashion. A new initiative this year was Interoliva, an "olive oil salon" covering over 1,000 square meters that aimed to promote table olives and olive oil. It comprised three different areas–one for tasting, one to display the different products and one for teaching sessions and information. Another star was the display of a hundred Spanish cheeses, which could be tasted as such, or as cooking ingredients of a sophisticated meal.
For further information: www.alimentaria.com

Wine

In January, **Bodegas Marqués de Murrieta** presented their Marqués de Murrieta Mazuelo wine to commemorate their 150th anniversary. According to the owner, Vicente Count de Creixell, this varietal wine produced from one of the traditional D.O.C. Rioja grapes, the red Mazuelo, is the result of a combination of tradition and the latest trends in Rioja wine. The basis for this new special vintage are the late harvest and the use of two types of oak in the aging process. Only 3,500 magnum bottles were produced.

Europe is faithful to Rioja wine. This is the finding of the study carried out by A.C. Nielsen in 10 E.U. countries and commissioned by the Regulatory Council of the **D.O.C. Rioja.** Rioja lies in sixth position amongst

international appelations with 40 percent of interviewees knowing the name of Rioja, and with 55 percent of those who have tried it remaining loyal. Rioja is only beaten by three French wine-growing areas (Bordeaux, Bourgogne and Beaujolais) and two Italian ones (Chianti and Toscana).

Bodegas Ventura de Vega (D.O. Ribera de Guadiana) have brought out two new wines from Extremadura–Leyenda 99 and Cadencia 01, both made from Tempranillo grapes. Leyenda 99, the winery's flagship product, is a top-range, bright red crianza wine. Nine months in oak and six in the bottle create perfect equilibrium between the fruit and the top-quality wood. Cadencia 01 is a young red resulting from a combination of carbonic and traditional maceration. Its aroma is fruity, with complex mineral touches.

In February, the Madrid restaurant, El Chaflán, was the venue chosen by **Bodegas López Hermanos** (D.O. Málaga) to present two new, top-range, sweet wines, one made from Moscatel and the other from Pedro Ximénez grapes. The small quantities produced and their sensory qualities have led them to be classified as Reserva de familia. The moscatel wine, based on the Alexandria variety, undergoes controlled-temperature fermentation and aging for twelve months on its fine lees in tanks, and for six

months in new Allier oak casks. The results are excellent–an old gold color and floral and fruity aromas with hints of toast and minerals. The carefully-crafted Pedro Ximénez wine is a dark mahogany color. Its aromas of raisin and wood with a touch of toast give it elegance and smoothness in the mouth. Oxidative aging for 18 months in French oak casks from the Vosges give it a powerful finish and a wonderfully rich body. Two young chefs from Catalonia, Oriol Balaguer and Jordi Butrón, both representing the latest trends in desserts, produced dishes to partner the wines. A fruit-based dessert with a bitter almond sponge and kumquat made the perfect partner for the Moscatel, and a Sacher "in couscous" was the subtle accompaniment for the Pedro Ximénez.

Miscellany

In January, in the La Broche restaurant in Madrid, Turisme de Catalunya (Tourism Board of Catalonia) presented the **Gastronomy Club (CdG)** which aims to galvanize gastronomy by establishing links of identity between cuisine and territory. Sergi Arola, the owner of the restaurant (two Michelin stars) is to act as the Club's culinary ambassador on an international level. Through the Catalonian Institute of the Mediterranean, the CdG is to create the Conservatoire of Mediterranean Cuisine in Catalonia with a view to preserving and disseminating Mediterranean culinary

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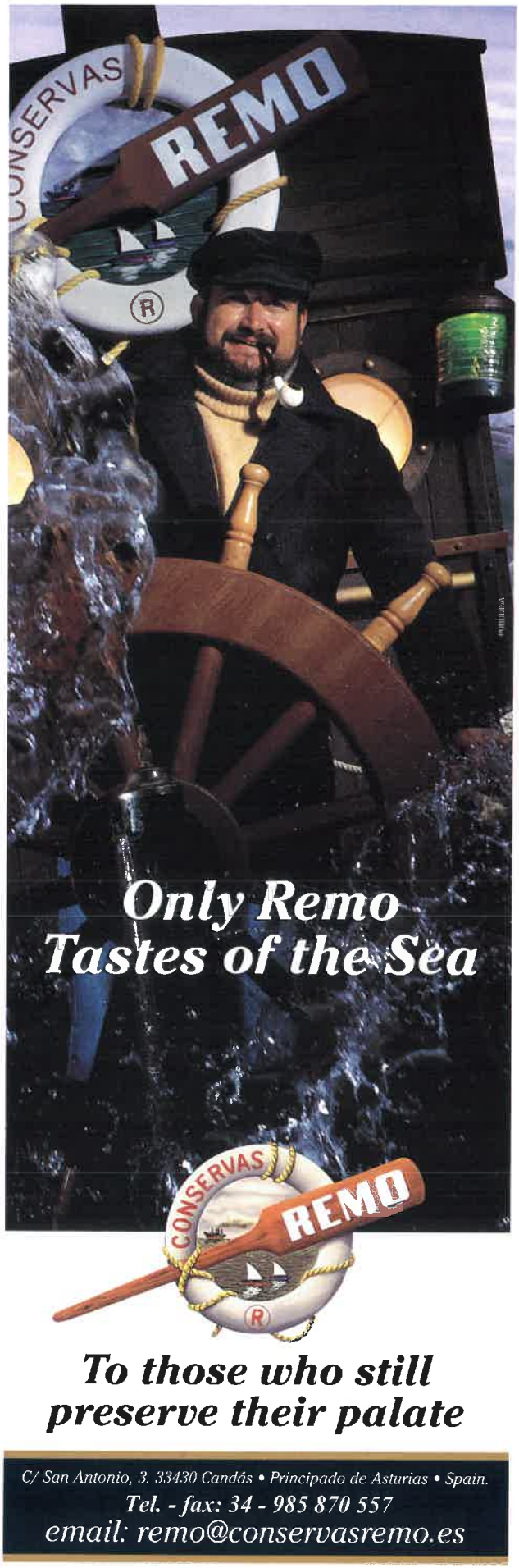

To those who still preserve their palate

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heritage. Groups from Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco will participate.

Chef **Martín Berasategui** (from San Sebastián) with his restaurant of the same name has been awarded his third star in the 2002 edition of the prestigious Michelin Red Guide. He has thus joined the other three Spanish chefs who hold this gastronomic distinction–**Arzak** (Arzak, San Sebastián), **Ferrán Adriá** (El Bulli, Rosas, Gerona) and **Santi Santamaría** (El Racó de Can Fabes, Sant Celoni, Barcelona). The Catalonian chef, Joan Roca (El Celler de Can Roca, Gerona), this year obtained his second star, bringing him in line with Pedro Subijana (Akelarre, San Sebastian) and Sergi Arola (La Broche, Madrid), amongst others. A first star was also bestowed upon the Terraza del Casino de Madrid.

A Taste of Spain is a travel agency that specializes in **gastronomic routes in Spain.** Set up by Marta Angulo and Anne Marie Aznares, experts from the world of agrifood products and Spanish gastronomy, it organizes tours in collaboration with food writers, chefs, culinary institutions and a large team of advisers. The possibilities offered include one-week routes, short stays in Andalusia (Heart of Andalusia) or the Rioja Wine Road. Accommodation is in four- or five-star hotels, *paradores* or rural hotels, with visits to restaurants and even the possibility of taking cookery lessons. They also organize personalized culinary routes all over Spain.
For further information: www.atasteofspain.com

RHEINGAU GOURMET FESTIVAL

Abroad

Spain took the limelight in the sixth edition of the **Rheingau Gourmet Festival** 2002 held in **Germany** from 7 to 18 March. This Festival aims to focus on the most outstanding features of the international gastronomic scene. Activities included blind tasting sessions of Riesling (Rheingau) and Albariño (Rías Baixas), large tasting sessions of the best wines from Jerez, Rioja, Ribera del Duero and Priorato, cooking demonstrations by leading international chefs, presentations of Spanish cheeses, charcuterie, ham and olive oils and exclusive dinners like the one prepared by chef Harald Wohlfahrt (three Michelin stars). All the events took place in the best German restaurants in the Rheingau area or within the beautiful Kloster Eberbach monastery.

As part of the ICEX program to promote Spanish food products and culinary culture, Ferrán Adriá, the best-known Spanish chef on the international scene, was invited to speak in the **Tokyo Gastronomy Meeting** held in the city's top gastronomy center, the Hattori Technical School. He demonstrated some of his innovative concepts and techniques in two master classes, making a great impression on his audience of 500 Japanese colleagues.

SPAIN OVERSEAS

If you would like to know more about any subject dealt with in this magazine, except for tourist information, please write to the Economic and Commercial Offices at the Embassies of Spain, marking the envelope Ref: Spain Gourmetour.

AUSTRALIA
Edgecliff Centre, suite 408
203 New South Head Road
Edgecliff NSW 2027
Sydney
Tel: (2) 93 62 42 12/3/4
Fax: (2) 93 62 40 57
buzon.oficial@sidney.
ofcomes.mcx.es

CANADA
55, Bloor St. West, suite 1204
Toronto-Ontario, M4W 1A5
Tel: (416) 967 04 88
Fax: (416) 968 95 47
buzon.oficial@toronto.
ofcomes.mcx.es

CHINA
14, Liang Ma He NanLu,
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Tel: (10) 65 32 20 72/31 03
Fax: (10) 65 32 11 28
buzon.oficial@pekin.
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25 Floor, Westgate Mall
1038 Nanjing Xi Road
200041 Shanghai
Tel: (21) 62 17 26 20/10
Fax: (21) 62 67 77 50
buzon.oficial@shanghai.
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DENMARK
Vesterbrogade 10, 3°
1620 Copenhagen V
Tel: (33) 31 22 10
Fax: (33) 21 33 90
buzon.oficial@copenhague.
ofcomes.mcx.es

HONG KONG
2004 Tower One,
Lippo Centre
89 Queensway Admiralty
Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 25 21 74 33
Fax: (852) 28 45 34 48
buzon.oficial@hongkong.
ofcomes.mcx.es

IRELAND
35, Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel: (1) 661 63 13
Fax: (1) 661 01 11
buzon.oficial@dublin.
ofcomes.mcx.es

ITALY
Via del Vecchio
Politecnico, 3-16
20121 Milan
Tel: (2) 78 14 00
Fax: (2) 78 14 14
buzon.oficial@milan.
ofcomes.mcx.es

JAPAN
Sanbancho KS Bldg.,
3Fl. 2 Sanbancho,
Chiyoda-Ku
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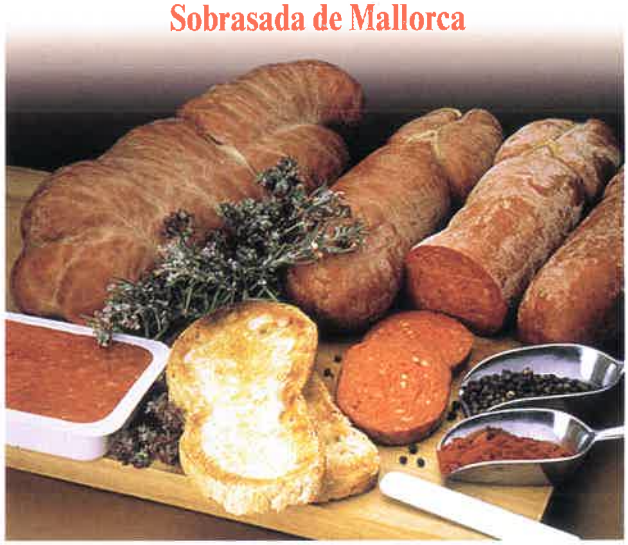

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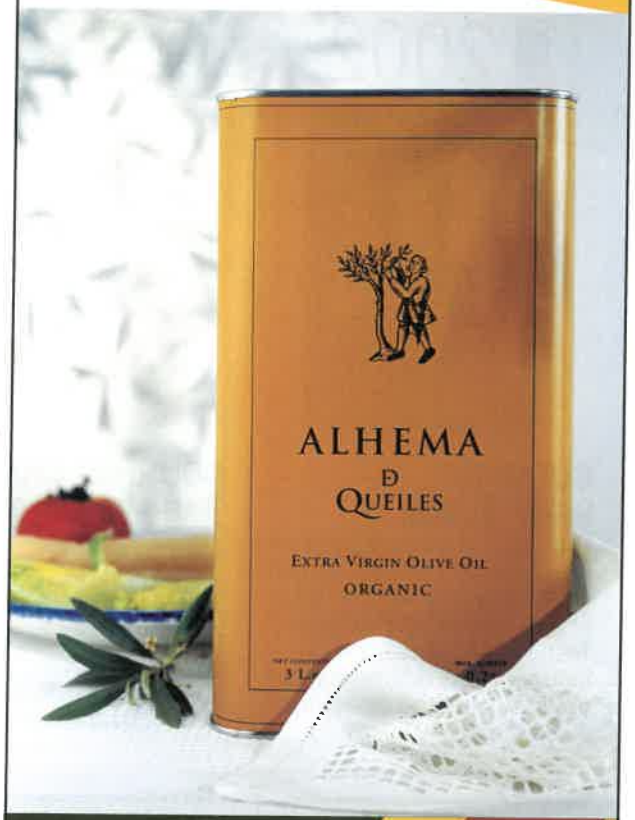

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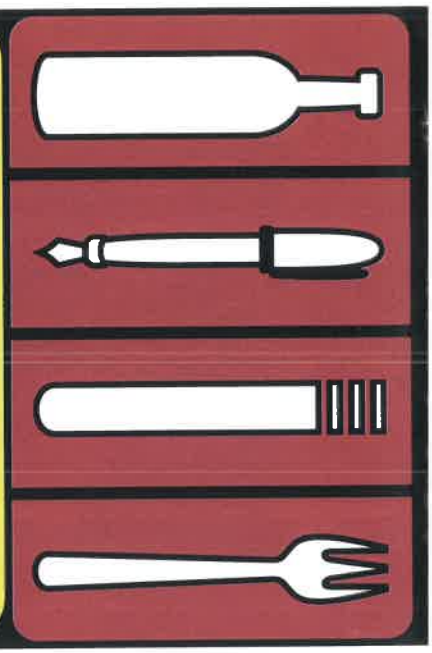

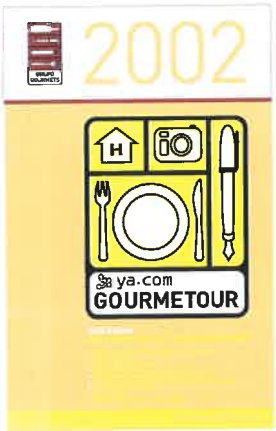

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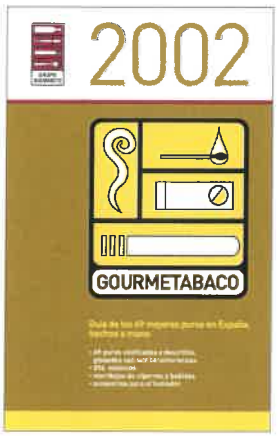

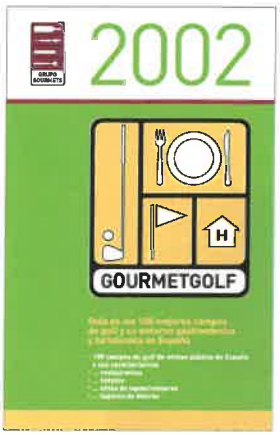

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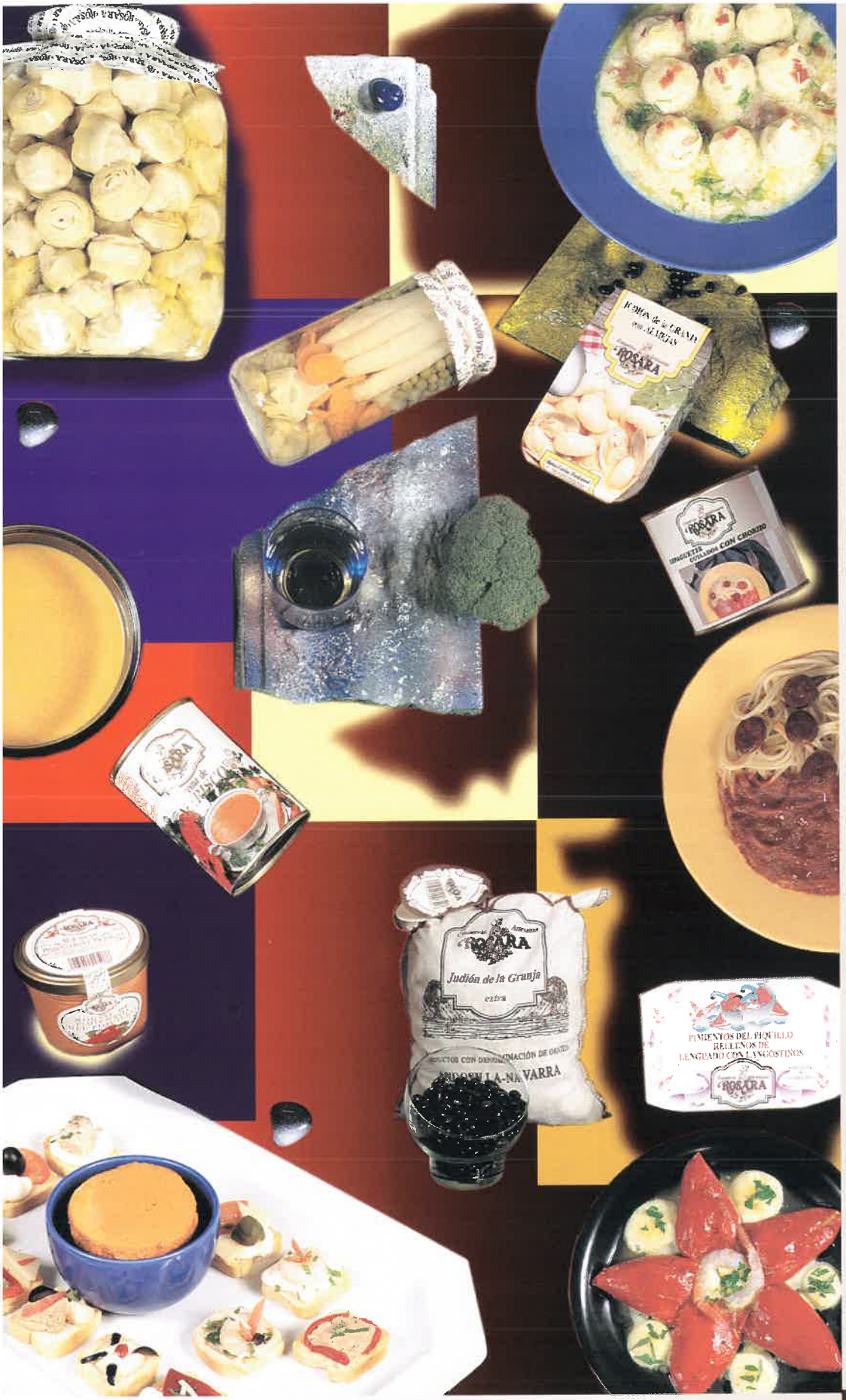

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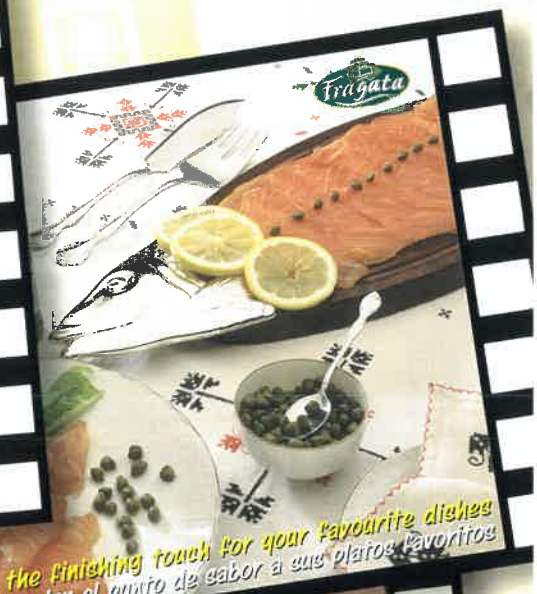

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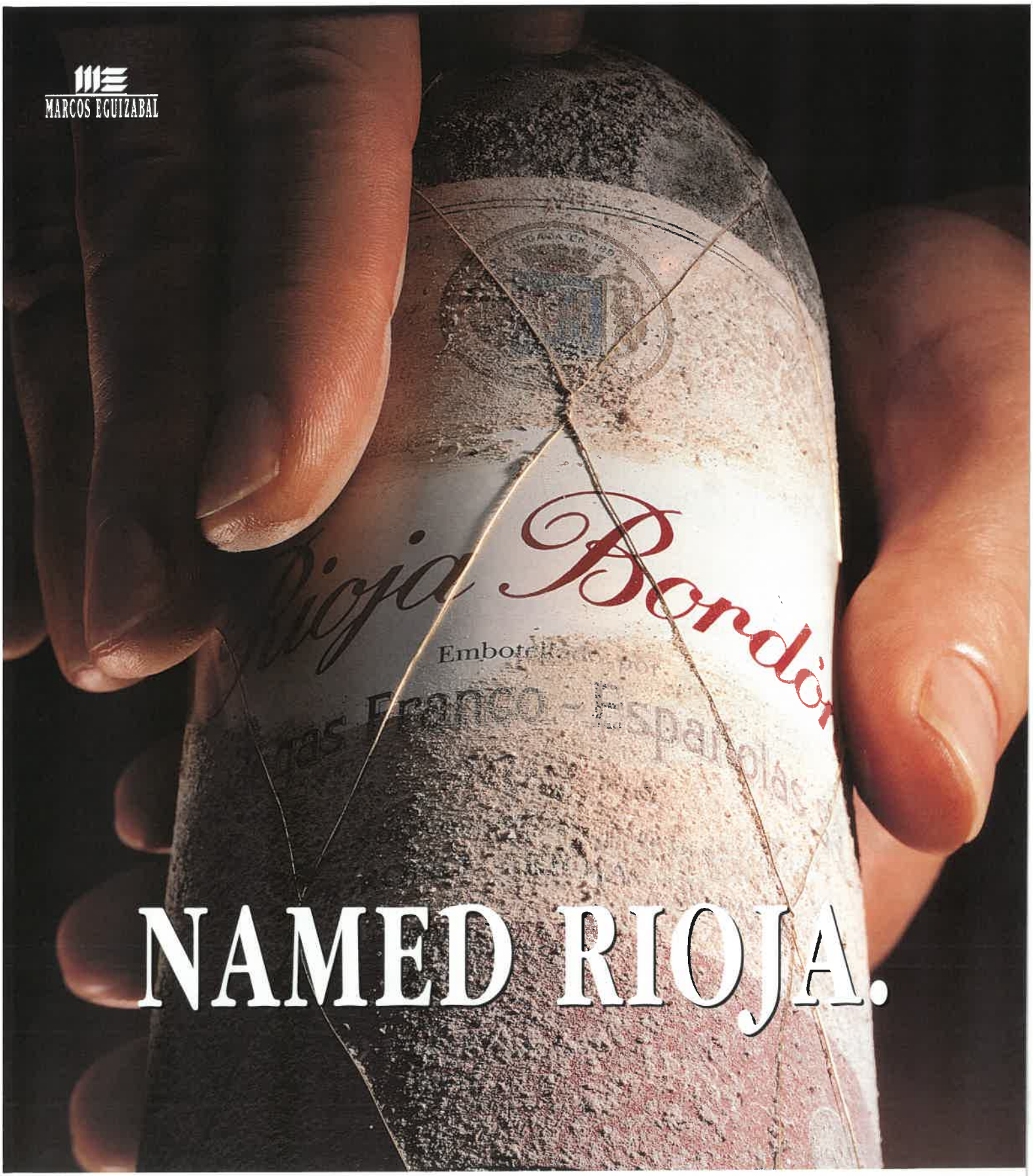

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GLOSSARY

Wine Aging Terms

Crianza. This term is reserved for wines aged in the wood and bottle for at least two years, six months of which must be in oak casks. (Note: In several regions the minimum time in cask is 12 months.)

Reserva. There are two types of standard for the use of this designation. Red wines must age for a minimum of 36 months in the wood and bottle, at least 12 of them in oak casks.

For rosé and white wines, the minimum period is 24 months, six of them in oak casks.

Gran Reserva. This term is used exclusively for red and claret wines that have aged for at least 24 months in oak casks followed by at least 36 months in the bottle. For white and rosé wines, the minimum period is 48 months of which a minimum of six months must be in the wood.

Notes:

1. Many Denominations insist that the oak casks must be no more than 225 liters, however, national legislation allows oak casks up to 1,000 liters.

2. Wines are often kept in vats for a few months prior to aging in casks, so the arithmetic varies for each one.

3. Many *bodegas* age their wines for more than the stipulated minimum periods.

Sherry

The aging system for sherry is the *solera* system, which is made up of a number of stages through which the younger wines pass, acquiring the characteristics of the older wines, thus ensuring the continuity of style. The butts (oak casks of 500 liters each) in the earlier stages are known as *criaderas*, and the last and oldest butts in the system are the solera stage from which the wine is taken for bottling. The solera stage is topped up from the next oldest stage (the first and oldest criadera) and that in turn is topped up from the next oldest. There is no stipulated number of stages, but four to six would be the average. No more than thirty percent of the wine may be removed from the solera in any one year.

Cava

This is the Denomination of Origin for sparkling wines produced by the traditional method, that is to say, that the secondary fermentation takes place in the same bottle in which it is sold. The *cava* demarcated region is in several zones, the most important of which is Catalonia. The others are Aragon, Navarre, La Rioja, Castile-León, Extremadura and Valencia. The Cava Denomination should not be confused with other denominations that might be associated with the provinces in which cava is produced. The minimum aging period for cava wines is nine months in the bottle, though many spend between 18 months and three years, and a few up to five years.

Denominación de Origen (D.O.)

Denomination of Origin is an official designation covering products whose raw materials are produced and manufactured within a specific geographical area, and which have distinctive qualities and characteristics due, mainly, to the natural environment, manufacture, and aging methods.

Denominación Específica (D.E)

The Specific Denomination covers products characterized by a relation to their geographical setting, with the use of certain raw materials, a determined method of production and/or manufacture, but differs from a D.O. in that these three factors do not necessarily have to coincide.

D.E. corresponds to the P.G.I. (Protected Geographic Indication) on European level.

Each D.O. or D.E. is managed by a Consejo Regulador (C.R.) or regulatory council, which sees to the enforcement of the regulations.

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Erratum
Some of the figures in the last issue of Spain Gourmetour No.54, in the article "The Gold and Green Mosaic: Spain's Olive Oil Terroirs" were incorrect.
The correct figures on page 34 and 38 are: Sierra Mágina DO: 72,000 ha/777,912 acres,
page 33: Montes de Toledo DO: 28,571 ha/70,599 acres.

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